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# THE INDEPENDENT

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## Allies blamed for Iraq cancer torment

SEVEN YEARS after the end of the Gulf war, a nightmare "epidemic" of leukemia and stomach cancer is claiming the lives of thousands of Iraqi civilians who live near the former war zone, including children so young that they were not even born when hostilities ended. Iraqi doctors in the southern city of Basra have recorded a four-fold increase in cancer - especially among young children - since 1991.

Doctors fear that farms which produce most of the city's food have been contaminated by depleted uranium shells used by the Allies during the last tank battles of the war. But some Iraqis suspect that American and British bombing of Saddam Hussein's chemical warfare factories may be to blame - or that US aircraft may themselves

have used some form of chemicals in their attacks. The mother of Ali Hilla, an eight-year-old child who lay dying in the al-Mansur hospital in Baghdad last week, told me that after Allied aircraft had bombed a broadcasting station near their family home in Dila in 1991, she smelt "a burning, choking smell, something like insecticide". Two doctors interviewed by *The Independent* believe that the fumes from burning oil refineries may have contained carcinogens; another spoke of "radiation" from bombs during the war. Even child cancer patients who might survive, however,

are in some cases dying for lack of vital medicines that could save their lives. At the al-Mansur hospital - which has treated hundreds of children in the past three years - Dr Yasser Raouf, the chief resident doctor, told me of the desperate need for Vincristine and Methotrexate for leukemia patients. Some children are receiving the left-over medicines of infants who have already died. Five-year-old Latif Abdul Sattar, from Babylon, also bald from chemotherapy - he looks like a Chernobyl victim - was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma three months ago but has been given only a 60 per

cent chance of survival because he is being treated with a substitute for Vincristine. Dr Jawad Khadim al-Ali, a member of the Royal College of Physicians who is a cancer specialist at Basra's largest hospital, says that in 1997 he treated 380 cancer patients in his own clinic - compared to scarcely 80 per year before 1991. In a country which is disintegrating under the effect of sanctions, there are no official government statistics on the startling increase in cancer reported by doctors. Perhaps fearing that cities may have been polluted by bio-chemical warfare products from bombed factories, the Iraqi health ministry has made no effort to publicise the tragedy. And since most of the victims are Shiites - the Muslim sect which rebelled against Saddam Hussein's rule in the aftermath of the war - there is little incentive for the Iraqi regime to care. In his oncology department, Dr al-Ali has pinned to the wall a set of maps of Basra governorate and Nasiriyah city, showing that most new cancer cases come from areas immediately to the east of the tank battles between US and Iraqi forces in February of 1991. "There are canals as well as farms throughout this area," Dr

al-Ali said. "There are rivers there. And always the wind comes from the west, towards Basra." When Dr al-Ali finished showing me his maps, we walked into the hallway outside to find a mass of young women and several old men waiting to see him, all of whom had developed cancer in the past five years. A woman with a crutch had a bone tumour in her thigh. A young woman in a black chador - a non-smoker with no history of cancer in her family - was suffering from lung cancer; a woman of 51 wearing an Islamic scarf, a schoolteacher and mother of five children, sud-

## 'Times' accused of bowing to China

NOW IT isn't only Rupert Murdoch's publishing house HarperCollins which is facing accusations of kow-towing to the Communist regime in Peking. *The Times* newspaper - owned by the Australian mogul since 1981 - has also drastically scaled back its critical coverage of China as its rapacious proprietor pursues his commercial interests there. The claims come from leading China-watcher Jonathan Mirsky, who was East Asia Editor of *The Times* until two months ago and has remained on a freelance basis since he retired in December. Mr Mirsky, who won an international award for his coverage of the Tiananmen Square massacre, claims that "*The Times* has simply decided, because of Murdoch's interests, not to cover China in a serious way." His comments - at a seminar hosted by the Freedom Forum, an international media foundation, and posted on that organisation's Internet website - are bound to inflame the controversy surrounding the decision by HarperCollins to dump a forthcoming book by the former governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, entitled *East and West*. Mr Mirsky told *The Independent* yesterday that he regarded this decision as "shameful". Commenting on *The Times*' general suppression of anything which might rile the Chinese authorities, at the Freedom Forum he said: "I don't know of any major paper in Hong Kong which has taken this kind of decision on its China coverage. And if it had, I am sure we would all say it is a scandal." "We have here what is arguably the traditionally most famous newspaper in the world, and it has just decided - it has not taken an executive decision, but an owner's position - to leave China and Hong Kong alone." Mr Mirsky alleges that senior News International executives flew to Peking in a vain bid to secure an exclusive interview with China's leader Jiang Zemin on the eve of the handover of Hong Kong. They were so eager for this scoop that they agreed to withdraw any embarrassing questions about the treatment of China's dissidents. Mr Mirsky pointed out that *The Times* was the only London-based broadsheet not to cover the recent arrival in London of China's most famous dissident, Wei Jingsheng. Leading article, page 18 Murdoch's empire, page 19



Latif Abdul Sattar, five, in the Saddam Hussein City Hospital, Baghdad. He has leukaemia and is not expected to survive. Photograph: Robert Fisk

## What's white, woolly, says baa, and earns £2m a year?

UNLESS you are seriously rich, the following may be a crushing blow: Dolly the sheep's successors could have a significantly higher annual income than you - £2m each, to be exact. This fact emerged yesterday as PPL Therapeutics, the Edinburgh company licensed to produce cloned farm animals, announced that it could fulfil the £100m annual world demand for the blood clotting protein Factor IX using only 50 cloned sheep. Each would have an added

human gene so that it generated the clotting protein in its milk. That could then be extracted and sold on the world market. In the UK alone, Factor IX - a protein essential for causing clotting - is prescribed for approximately 400 people who have the "B" form of haemophilia, the rarer form of the disease in which the blood will not clot. The UK market for Factor IX is about £4m annually, and the world market is 25 times that. Most is presently derived from human plasma. PPL says that its transgenic sheep produce 300mg per litre of Factor IX in their milk. Alan Colman, the company's research director, said: "I am very excited by this very high-level result. Levels of Factor IX in human blood are very low - approximately 5mg per litre - so the sheep have made 60 times the naturally circulating amount of this high-value protein."



Dolly: a £100m industry

The protein would be pure, so it should be disease-free. By contrast, the Government said last week that all British-derived blood plasma (from which Factor IX is made) would be destroyed, because of fears that it could be contaminated by "new variant" Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, caused by eating BSE-infected food. PPL has licensed the technique that produced Dolly - taking the DNA from an adult and putting it into an egg cell whose nucleus has been removed. The company could quickly produce a flock able to out-produce every rival, feeding it on nothing more complex than grass.

## Blair ready to ditch elected councils

TONY BLAIR will today tell Labour councillors that unless they cooperate with Whitehall in carrying forward his plans for local services, they will be replaced, probably by non-elected quangos, writes David Walker. "If you are unwilling to work to the modern agenda then the Government will have to look to other partners to take on your role," he says in a pamphlet for the Institute of Public Policy Research, the Labour-inclined think-tank.

He also offers councillors a carrot. If they cooperate, he promises to legislate to give them new responsibilities in health and crime prevention and possibly a cut of the business rates which the Thatcher government removed from local control. In unvarnished language - for a Prime Minister - he says that the choice confronting the town and county halls is now clear: they are either for him or against him. The quality of services, including schools, is at present too variable, Mr Blair writes. He compares the unevenness of councils with the situation in Victorian times when "a patchwork quilt of boroughs, boards and committees" overlapped and competed with each other. The way forward is not some rationalisation of powers in councils' favour. Instead future councils must act as impresarios in their areas, guaranteeing quality services but not themselves being service providers.

Mr Blair is evidently deeply worried by the size of turnouts at local government elections and calls for bright ideas about increasing participation. "Councils need to avoid getting trapped in the secret world of the caucus," he says. He advocates citizen's juries, more polling, fewer committee meetings, more young councillors, elected mayors - in short, a revolution in the way councils now operate. Corruption revealed, page 4


## Diners will pay for the minimum wage

TIPPING could become a thing of the past, with an automatic service charge added to all restaurant bills, in response to plans being considered by the Low Pay Commission, writes Andrew Yates. It is working on how to implement the national minimum wage, and last night restaurantiers predicted the proposals would increase the cost of eating out. Whitbread, with chains

such as TGI Friday's, Café Rouge and Bella Pasta, fears the commission plans to exclude tips in calculating minimum pay for restaurant workers. Many workers rely on tips to top up their salary. Average pay in the sector is well below the minimum likely to be introduced by the Government. If restaurantiers have to raise wages it will cost the industry millions of pounds. They are planning to claw the money back by levying an automatic service charge which will go to them rather than employees, or raising the price of meals. Simon Ward, government affairs director at Whitbread, said: "We are considering introducing a standard service charge but that would have the effect of reducing incentives for staff to provide good service." David Ports, human-re-

sources director at City Centre Restaurants, Britain's largest quoted independent restaurant group, which runs Deep Pan Pizza, Garfunkels and Café Uno, said: "We don't levy a service charge at the moment ... but we would have to give it serious consideration if this policy is adopted. Companies must do something to maintain their profits." Tips of the trade, page 4

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# In a nether region between art and porn

## University faces charges over photographs

By Steve Boggan

A UNIVERSITY and a firm of publishers are preparing to be prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act for refusing to destroy a book by the controversial photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Academics at the University of Central England in Birmingham and executives at Jonathan Cape are expected to refuse a police request for them to pulp the book when they meet officers from the West Midlands Paedophile and Pornography Unit. Mapplethorpe, a copy of which is in the British Library and most university libraries, was seized by police last October. They had been alerted by a chemist who developed photographs of the book taken by a student for a thesis on "Fine Art versus Pornography". Lawyers acting for the Crown Prosecution Service decided parts of it were likely to "deprave or corrupt" under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act and advised the police that they had grounds to ask the university to voluntarily destroy it. As well as portraits and studies of flowers, the late Mapplethorpe's work features explicit photographs of his - and other people's - sex lives. His most notorious image is of himself with a whip in his rectum. Another work shows two men "fisting". His work has been shown at most major galleries in the western world, including the Institute of Contemporary Arts, the Hayward Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery in London, and is highly regarded by most art critics. The university and the publishers reacted with astonishment to the CPS's advice to the police. "We will not voluntarily destroy this book," said Dr Peter Knight, vice-chancellor. "I am expecting to meet the police soon with the university lawyers. If there is a prosecution and the courts rule that the book should be destroyed, then we will, reluctantly obey the ruling. The work is of a high artistic standard and would certainly not 'deprave or corrupt' under the Act. It is unusual, yes, but not erotic and not pornography." Susan Sandon, Jonathan Cape marketing director, said: "This has been in print since 1992 and we certainly have no plans to withdraw it. It is freely available. We have not been contacted by the police yet, so we cannot say what action, if any, we plan to take." However, it is understood that the company would resist any attempt to make it destroy stocks and abandon reprints. West Midlands Police said officers would be talking to Jonathan Cape. A confrontation seems unavoidable.



Mapplethorpe self-portrait: one of the less explicit images in the book

"DEALING WITH sexuality is always difficult, and it would be easy to write Robert off as an exhibitionist. But all he did was to reveal to us a part of our lives: it was just another kitchen sink, but this one had gold tape and designer handbags." Perhaps if the men of the West Midlands Paedophile and Pornography squad had read this description of Robert Mapplethorpe's work they would not now be engaged in an exercise in book-burning, writes Steve Boggan.

The words were written by the late film director Derek Jarman shortly before he, like Mapplethorpe, died of Aids. What Mapplethorpe was doing with his images of black and white men embracing, of a bullwhip up his backside, of the sado-masochists who invited him into their bedrooms, of a penis in a polyester suit, was chronicling real life, albeit in a world most of us never inhabit. Whenever the argument of art versus pornography arises, Mapplethorpe's name is always thrown into the debate, with as many supporters as detractors. Yet few would dispute the quality of his work and materials and even those who find his images unpalatable rarely argue that his intention was to titillate in the way of pornography.

Yesterday, those who like him and those who don't were united in their astonishment over the police's decision to seize the book. "Bizarre is the only way to describe this," said Emma Dexter, exhibitions director at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, which gave him his first British solo exhibition in the early 1980s. "Art has to be about the society in which we live and the setting in which he lived had some profoundly hypnotic images of desire and sexuality. Whether you like what he and his friends did is another matter, but I don't find it pornographic."

His friends ranged from Andy Warhol to Patti Smith, the singer and poet with whom he lived for a while in his New York loft. (He was bisexual.) Born in New York City in 1946, Mapplethorpe studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in the 1960s. He first began drawing the attention of the avant-garde set with a series of underground films including one in which he starred entitled "Robert Having His Nipple Pierced" in 1971.

## IN THE NEWS ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

He dabbled in sculpture but gradually became consumed by photography. In the early 1970s he took pictures with Polaroid cameras, cutting up the images and mixing them with pictures from pornographic magazines. He had his first exhibition in 1972.

His early work was supported by the wealthy American photographer collector Sam Wagstaff, who became his lover and patron. Later, however, everyone who was anyone paid to have their portrait taken by Mapplethorpe, usually at around \$10,000 a sitting.

But it was his work exploring the freakish side of sexuality and his fasci-

ination with black subjects, who often became lovers, that earned him his reputation for controversy. One of his pictures, entitled "Man in Polyester Suit", features a black penis hanging from the trousers of a business suit.

Many of his images featured apparently violent sado-masochistic sex, although Jarman remembered him as a gentle lover. After his death from Aids in 1989 at the age of 43, Patti Smith described her relationship with him as "intense and bizarre", likening him to a devil. His famous self-portrait has him growing devil's horns.

"I think that he was a skilful photographer and some of his work had a certain artistic quality but a good deal of it was worthless in my opinion," said Martin Gayford, art critic for *The Spectator*. "Nevertheless, I would not want to see it persecuted by the civil authorities. I thought we were above burning books in this country."

**STRETCH AT HAYWARD**  
Mapplethorpe always courted controversy. In 1996 the Hayward Gallery withdrew two pictures from an exhibition after consulting police.

One was of a five-year-old girl wearing a dress but no underwear sitting with her legs open; the other was of two men engaged in the homosexual practice of "fisting". Esther Rantzen (above, right), chairwoman of Child Line, described the picture of the girl, Rosie, as "horrific" although it drew no complaints when it was exhibited in New York.

**A KICK FROM CLICKING**  
During a BBC Arena programme accompanying his exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in 1998, Mapplethorpe said he got a kick from pornographic images that he never got from art. He said that was

what led him to make art from pornographic images but he did not see the end result as pornographic.

**MONKEY BUSINESS**  
Mapplethorpe was set up with a camera and studio by the millionaire photographer lover Sam Wagstaff, according to the late film director Derek Jarman. Jarman told of how, during an early meeting, Wagstaff gave Mapplethorpe a diamond pin in the shape of a monkey. It remained pinned to his lapel until he discovered that it was worth a fortune. Jarman believed it had been made by Fabergé and described it as an example of how he felt Mapplethorpe had sold out.

**A FAUSTIAN PACT**  
"There is a closed room in Robert's work. Something even secret to Robert," wrote Jarman. "His life was, to me, a Chinese box. You opened the first and there was another box inside. And the last contained a wad of dollar bills held in the hands of some of the most powerful men in the American art world. Robert's story is the story of Faust."

# Family of murdered doctor launch civil action against her ex-boyfriend

By Kate Watson-Smyth

THE FAMILY of a young doctor who was murdered more than three years ago yesterday launched an unprecedented High Court civil action against her former boyfriend whom they suspect of killing her. The body of Joan Francisco, a 27-year-old gynaecologist, was found wearing only knickers and a T-shirt in her flat in north-west London, on Boxing Day in 1994. She was strangled with a vacuum cleaner cord. Following a lengthy police investigation, the Crown Prosecution Service ruled there was insufficient evidence to bring a prosecution, but now her family have brought a civil action against Anthony Diedrick, claiming assault and battery leading to her murder. It is believed to be the first time a civil case has been brought against a suspect before there has been any criminal prosecution linked to the murder.

Patrick O'Connor QC, for the Francisco family, said Mr Diedrick, who was a former boyfriend from six years before, harboured a "violent and perverted obsession" for Ms Francisco which led to her death. "That obsession intensified in the months before Christmas 1994 and reached a crisis on the day of her murder," he said. Ms Francisco, who was always conscious of her personal security, had been due to fly out to California to visit her sisters, Margaret and Celia, on the day she died. Mr O'Connor said that when Mr Diedrick heard she was leaving for the United States he assumed that she was leaving long-term or permanently. "It is his belief by him that she may have been leaving the country for such a length of time that led to his harbouring a growing sense of crisis in his obsession and the need for some kind of dramatic confrontation or gesture on the morning of Boxing Day."

Margaret told the court that she met Mr Diedrick in the late 1980s when he visited Los Angeles with her sister and described how he "got into a seething rage - like he was going to erupt". "It really shook me up and I was very disturbed by the anger and hostility he displayed just because of a difference of opinion," she said. Mr O'Connor said it was no coincidence that Joan was murdered only hours before her departure for the United States. "Anthony Diedrick knew about her departure and seems to have imagined that he may never see her again. There is nobody else for whom that day and this hour had any such significance."

Mr Diedrick, a computer studies graduate, had a relationship with Joan which started in February 1987 and was ended by her at Christmas 1988. The court heard that Mr Diedrick became obsessed with Ms Francisco. "On one occasion he smashed his way through a patio door and chased Joan and a male friend, who he threatened to kill, upstairs where they locked themselves in a room, the court heard. Mr Diedrick told police that he felt compelled to go to the house and spoke in "apocalyptic terms" of how he had wanted to kill the friend and would rather die than go to prison. In 1994 he saw Ms Francisco in a nightclub and his obsession was revived. A week before her death he pushed a note for her through the door of her mother's house. It said: "It's unlikely that we'll ever see each other or



Murder victim Joan Francisco (left) and Anthony Diedrick (right) Photograph: Photonews

speak to each other again. It would have been nice if we could have had a last few words together."

Mr O'Connor said: "Those words speak volumes. Unless Tony Diedrick is thinking in apocalyptic terms from the point of view of his obsession, he couldn't be writing those words."

# 'Full Monty' hit by plagiarism writ

By Tim Cornwell in Los Angeles

THE MAKERS of *The Full Monty*, celebrated world-wide for its original Yorkshire wit, are being sued for plagiarism by two New Zealand playwrights. A suit filed in Los Angeles claims the film's setting, premise and some character development were based on a 1987 play "Ladies Night". A lawyer for Fox Searchlight Pictures, the small film subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation which financed the film, yesterday dismissed the suit out of hand. "It seems like these days, almost every film has this kind of claim," said Bert Fields.

by the film's creative team. The specific similarities seemed, on the face of it, weak.

They included the presence of a sole black character, hints that another is homosexual, and the falling marriage of a third. But the two authors said they will post a copy on a World Wide Web site for the public to "judge for themselves".

In recent weeks *The Full Monty*'s makers have been conducting what amounts to a typical Oscar campaign: print ads in trade newspapers and media interviews with the main players. They help raise the film's profile for the roughly 5,000 voting members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Mr Fields suggested the suit was deliberately timed to raise doubts just as Oscar ballots are being mailed for voting that concludes a week before the awards show on 23 March.

"Where have these people been the last six or seven months?" he asked.

The suit certainly strikes at the play's heart. *Monty* is considered a long shot for best picture or director, against the likes of *Titanic*. Producer Uberto Pasolini told the *Los Angeles Times* that it was a "wholly original piece of work".

# Corruption revealed in Labour council

By Anthony Bevins  
Political Editor

A LABOUR chief whip on Peterborough council abused party discipline to drive through corrupt planning schemes, it was reported yesterday.

Jerry White, the local government ombudsman, referred in a report to two Labour councillors — man and wife — who were jailed in 1995 on charges connected with two cases of maladministration.

A Labour spokesman said last night that as soon as the matter had come to the attention of the party, the pair had been "chopped off at the knees, and told goodbye".

Two complaints were made to the ombudsman, about the way in which the council had handled planning applications. Mr White has urged the council to compensate the claimants for any reduction in the value of their homes resulting from improper developments.

The ombudsman's office said in a press notice: "In each case the ombudsman found maladministration by the council for the failure of former Councillor John Dalgarno and former Councillor Sally Dalgarno to declare their interest. The interest arose through Mr Dalgarno's business dealings with the site developer and through a corrupt arrangement to secure planning permission for projects for that same developer."

He also found that the way in which party discipline had been used to decide planning applications amounted to maladministration.

Mr Dalgarno was the chief whip at the time of the decision which was the subject of the complaint. Mr White said: "In

these cases, the abuse of the party discipline put the whole Labour majority group and the city's planning system into the hands of the councillors Dalgarno and the developer."

Police were called after complaints by Labour and Conservative councillors to the chief planning officer in 1991. The two councillors and the developer were found guilty in June 1995.

Mrs Dalgarno was convicted of receiving the construction of a conservatory from the developer, named as "Mr Sherbourne", as an inducement for supporting planning applications. Mr Dalgarno was found guilty on the conservatory count, along with charges of receiving a Ford Orion from another defendant, and of receiving £3,500 for backing planning applications.

Mr White's report said that because councillors should decide planning applications on the facts, it was inappropriate to impose party discipline on the planning process.

But Mr Dalgarno was chief whip of the majority group on the planning sub-committee when the disputed applications were passed — against the advice of officers — and party discipline was imposed throughout the process.

Mr White also said: "Although, given the passage of time, it may be difficult to do so, I hope that the council will now go on to consider whether injustice has been caused to other residents as a consequence of any planning permission granted in similar circumstances to those I have identified."

The former councillor John Dalgarno is not John Dalgarno, managing director of Tarmac Contract Housing.



Service with a smile: Sara Kippel tends to the lunchtime clientele at the All Bar One café bar in Regent Street, central London, yesterday

Photograph: David Rose

## Service without a smile as restaurant staff contemplate end to tips of the trade

By Rosa Prince

AT the All Bar One café bar in Regent Street central London, yesterday the implications of a possible end to tipping as we know it, were beginning to sink in.

John Mills, who works as an importer, was having lunch with his wife Gill, a recruitment consultant. Mr Mills said: "I hate the idea. We go to a lot of

restaurants already where there is a service charge included in the bill and if you get terrible service you have to have a major altercation not to pay it."

Mrs Mills also preferred to tip at will, but for a different reason. "If you get really good service you like to tip more. We understand waiters depend on tips."

Their waitress, Patricia Movillo, a student from Argentina who works at All Bar

One to finance her degree, said she liked to be tipped for good service. "It is good to have tips because you get cash and that is nice pocket money. If you give better service you are given a tip — it's common sense," she said.

When she started at All Bar One a year ago she earned £3.60 an hour. That has now gone up to £4.60 and waiters can earn up to £6 in tips on a good lunch time.

Even so, waitress Helen Walker — who earns £4.10 an hour — said she would prefer an increased steady wage. "I don't make an awful lot in tips," she said. "You can't really rely on them. Sometimes you expect to get a lot and you end up with nothing. I would rather have a straight hourly rate."

Stephen Neil, who runs a wine business, also thinks there is merit in scrapping discretionary tips. He said: "It is a better way as far as the client is concerned. You should be able to get up and go without the embarrassment of trying to decide how much to tip. You don't have to impress the girlfriend, and if the waitress pulls faces at you, you can tell her to get stuffed."

Joe Green, a management consultant, said compulsory service meant a costly tip if the meal was expensive. He said: "The fact that you are paying more or less shouldn't change the service from the waiter."

His server Nick Hamley, an Australian, who has been working at All Bar One for three months to fund his travels, said: "I think it is a little bit unfair to end tipping. The hospitality industry is almost based on tips and service. You go out of your way to look after people and it's like a reward."



Sunday's rural march: the number taking part is disputed

## Countryside march 'half claimed size'

Ian Burrell

A STUDY of Sunday's Countryside March in London has concluded 142,259 people took part, half the total claimed by organisers. Researchers from Napier University in Edinburgh set up a monitoring station alongside the march route in Piccadilly and used video equipment to count marchers.

March organisers said 284,500 people took part in the day the countryside came to town. The Edinburgh team took video grab pictures of marchers at three-minute intervals throughout the five-hour event and found marchers were travelling at 1.07 metres a second and passing the monitoring point at the rate of eight marchers a second.

A 3.7m wide strip of the route contained a mean of 27.49 people in the 100 video grabs, with the flow of marchers altering only slightly during the event. The researchers, from the university's computer studies department, calculated the numbers on the march were between 133,118 and 151,400.

Yesterday the Countryside Alliance said the researchers needed to "check their methodology". Spokeswoman Janet George said eight monitors had counted each line of marchers as they left the start. "We have done our own very, very care-

ful count," she said. "[The Edinburgh researchers] are wrong by a very long way."

Scotland Yard estimated the turn-out at 250,000. A spokesman said it was the guesswork of experienced officers. "It's very difficult and is always an approximation," he added. The technique was inspired by methods used by marine scientists to count seals on beaches.

Mathematician Russell Leaper said the team hoped to use their methods to measure other demonstrations. "People have been assessing the level of support for these events using very, very poor evidence. Every time there is a major demonstration there is a big argument about the numbers."

The researchers said their work had been helped by the fact that the crowd was carefully controlled and that the "flow rate and march speed were much more consistent than might have been anticipated".

It was admitted that some of the walkers may have dropped out of the march soon after the start, before reaching the monitoring point — 2km down the route — and thus not been counted.

The Edinburgh study was commissioned by the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals, which was opposed to the march.

## Chip van worker survives gunman's murder bid

A Catholic man survived a murder bid in Northern Ireland yesterday when a gunman's weapon jammed.

Security sources say the attempted shooting in Toombridge, Co Antrim, bore all the hallmarks of a loyalist attack.

The victim was working in a mobile chip van on Hillhead Road around midday when a man armed with a handgun approached and attempted unsuccessfully to fire shots, police said.

Irish Army experts yesterday carried out three controlled explosions on a massive car bomb ready for use across the border in Northern Ireland, the second such device in a week to be linked to the break-away Republican group the Continuity IRA.

## 30 inmates shared drug needle

As many as 30 women inmates at a Wiltshire jail have shared a single needle to inject drugs including heroin, it was revealed yesterday. An inspection report added that the sharing of needles is widespread at Eristoke jail, near Salisbury Plain.

Prison officials had provided inmates with cleaning fluid to keep injecting equipment sterile, but have withdrawn the service. Sharing needles appears to have caused a rise in the number of prisoners infected with hepatitis C. Sir David Ramsbotham, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, said in a report: "...The use of injectable drugs such as heroin was increasing. Received intelligence showed very considerable sharing of injecting equipment with up to 30 people sharing one syringe and needle."

## Ecclestone accepts his £1m

The Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone has cashed the £1m cheque Labour sent him in November, a party spokesman said yesterday.

The cheque covered a donation which Labour returned on the advice of Lord Neill, chairman of the committee on standards in public life. That followed the controversy over Tony Blair's decision to sanction an exemption from a ban on tobacco advertising for Formula One racing.

Mr Ecclestone, a millionaire, received the cheque on 25 November but said he did not want the money back. Labour was to give the money to charity if he had not cashed it by 25 May.

## Paramedic cleared of rape

An ambulance paramedic accused of raping three former patients was cleared of seven charges by a Crown Court jury.

It was alleged that Gordon Thompson, 35, raped the women after picking them up on 999 calls, then returning to their homes claiming he was making a follow-up call. But a jury at Oxford Crown Court cleared Thompson of five counts of rape and two of indecent assault after a five-day trial.

The jury is still considering verdicts on one further count of rape and one of indecent assault. They were told that the women were all vulnerable and had alcohol or drug problems.

## Murder case son can appeal

The younger son of "domineering" teacher Eve Howells, who was battered to death by her elder son after subjecting the boys to years of abuse, was yesterday granted leave to appeal against his conviction of taking part in the murder.

The Court of Appeal said John Howells, 17, had grounds for arguing that the judge at his Leeds Crown Court trial a year ago had wrongly withdrawn from the jury the question of whether he had acted under provocation.

# Children's cartoons harmless, says ITV study

CONCERN that children are addicted to high action, violent cartoons is groundless, according to research published yesterday.

Most prefer factual and drama programmes, the Independent Television Commission survey said.

The report, "Cartoon Crazy?", is the first in the UK to draw on the views of children themselves, looking at those

aged five to nine and mothers.

One of the authors, Sue Chambers, said television was one of many complementary activities which children enjoyed and what needed to be encouraged was watching a wide range of programmes. "Cartoons are an important part of children's viewing because they are short and easy to dip in and out of," she said. "They're more relax-

ing than challenging to watch."

The survey, covering more than 60 children, their mothers and two whole families, found no difference between the attitudes of youngsters who watched cable and satellite and those who saw only terrestrial television.

The report drew a distinction between cartoons like *The Flintstones*, *Scooby Doo* and *Rugrats* and action animations such as *Street Sharks*, *Spider-*

*man* and *Batman And Robin*.

While they had a broad appeal, only the narrow band of boys aged five to seven enjoyed action cartoons and many watched them only because nothing else was on.

The report found the most popular cartoons were those like *Tom and Jerry* which included slapstick humour.

The ITC also found a difference between "good scary"

cartoons, like *Scooby Doo*, and "bad scary" ones such as the computer-animated *Reboot*. The first category was enjoyed by those who participated in the report, often because there was excitement and humour, but few enjoyed the latter, which often included the use of violent weapons.

Ms Chambers said some of the mothers were shocked by the aggressive and "dark" pro-

grammes their children were watching. However, even though some of the children found them disturbing they realised they were simply cartoons, that nobody got hurt and that the good characters always won. And for younger viewers the more frightening, complex plots were more likely to go over their heads, boring them rather than upsetting them.

Peter Rogers, ITC chief ex-

ecutive, said: "This research shows that children can be as discerning in their viewing as adults."

Another ITC report suggested young children could be disturbed by "morphing" images in advertising. The computer technique, which transforms people into creatures, has been used in adverts by Peugeot and Im Bru. Frank Willis, ITC director of advertising and

sponsorship, said advertisers had been warned about using the technique.

A third ITC study released yesterday, on television as a teaching aid, found that those students who enjoyed learning from television were more likely to value reading as a learning method. English and reading were among the subjects for which television is most used and seen as most beneficial.

## Dame Edna takes a bundle of cash from Jeffrey Archer

By David Lister  
Arts News Editor

DAME EDNA EVERAGE is being bankrolled by Jeffrey Archer.

The unlikely combination – they have apparently been friends for 20 years – presented themselves at Lord Archer's penthouse flat in London yesterday, complete with its Lowrys and Monets, to announce that Lord Archer will be putting up the £500,000 for Dame Edna's next West End show.

In a press conference by the Dame which turned into a monologue almost as long and just as funny as one of her shows, she broke with the usual convention of actorly solidarity.

She would show herself on stage, she said, to be "a kind of upmarket Judi Dench, an attractive Glenda Jackson, a well-dressed Diana Rigg".

The all-new show will for the first time tell the story of Dame Edna's childhood, youth and marriage to ill-fated Norm, as well as his subsequent unfortunate medical history.

"My husband's first urological accident has been set to music and dance – that's unique in the history of theatre," Dame Edna said.

"Family enough, since he passed away, his prostate has never been in better health."

Dame Edna's alter ego Barry



Backer: Jeffrey Archer

Edna wins a "lovely mother" prize in Melbourne and it is sponsored by "The Daily Murdoch".

The second half will be Dame Edna with old sidekick Madge, who has threatened to rival Lord Archer in the running for London's mayor.

Lord Archer said he and fellow art lover Mr Humphries went back 20 years and he had asked the peer if he could launch the show in his sumptuous riverside apartment.

He had not seen all the show, including songs by Kit Hesketh-Harvey and James McConnell. But he said: "You will not feel surprised if there are some fairly well-known tunes with different words. And you will not be surprised if the audience is invited to sing along."

Edna – the Spectacle Returns has its premiere at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford, Surrey, a week tomorrow. It stays there until it moves to the Theatre Royal in the West End on Saturday 21 March.



Dame for a laugh: 'Housewife megastar' Dame Edna Everage is preparing to throw a spotlight on her past in a brand new show

Photograph: Brian Harris

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## Successful Growth and Favorable Outlook.

Excerpts from Chairman Pierre Bellon's address to the Annual Meeting of Shareholders, February 24, 1998.

### 1996/1997 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Over the year, consolidated sales increased by 18 percent to FRF 26.5 billion, broken down as follows:

- Organic growth ..... 7 percent
  - Acquisitions ..... 11 percent
  - Currency effect ..... 10 percent
- Operating margin widened to 4.7 from 4.5 percent, continuing the steady growth trend of the past five years.

Group share of Consolidated net income totaled FRF 540 million, a 34 percent increase from the previous year's Group share of consolidated net income before non-recurring items. After currency exchange rates, the increase came to 29 percent.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Last September 30, Sodexo Alliance and Marriott International, Inc. agreed to combine their Food and Management Services businesses in the United States and Canada in a new company known as Sodexo Marriott Services, Inc. To finance the transaction, we increased our capital by FRF 2 billion in November by issuing 835,770 new shares at a price of FRF 2,400 per share. Shareholders responded very positively to the issue.

Sodexo Marriott Services, Inc. will be North America's leading provider of Food and Management Services, with more than 4,800 operating accounts, FRF 24 billion in sales and 100,000 associates. Its shares will be listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

The merger is taking place in a positive environment and should be completed at the end of March.

Separately, on October 31, Sodexo-Gardiner Merchant acquired Marriott International's Food and Management Services business in the United Kingdom.

### OUTLOOK

The creation of Sodexo Marriott Services, Inc. represents an exceptional opportunity for our Company. Although we led the Food and Management Services market in Europe and the rest of the world prior to the merger, we ranked only fourth in North America, far behind the market leaders. With Sodexo Marriott Services, Inc., we will be number one in North America, thereby strengthening our global leadership.

\* Once again, Sodexo Alliance has gained new scope and depth. Over a full year, i.e. in fiscal year 1998/1999, we will have around FRF 56.5 billion in sales, more than FRF 3 billion in operating profit and more than 210,000 associates. In five years, we have multiplied sales by five, operating profit by nine and the number of associates by four.

\* We have also changed our profile. With Food and Management Services accounting for a larger share of our revenue stream, in 2000, this business will generate more than 90 percent of our sales and around 85 percent of operating profit. In addition, we are becoming increasingly international. In 2000, more than 85 percent of our sales will be made outside France.

\* Our debt has increased, limiting our ability to make new acquisitions. After three years of alliances and major acquisitions – Gardner Merchant, Fortina, Sodexo Marriott Services, Inc., Sodexo Alliance will now enter a phase of consolidation. During this period, we will focus on developing internal synergy and enhancing organic growth.

\* Synergy will be created through the cross-fertilization of skills and the development of economies of scale in the country operations, with the support of our global network. To do this, we will reduce purchasing costs, optimize restaurant working methods, negotiate international agreements with global suppliers, rationalize management structures, redeploy sales forces, forge agreements with global customers, eliminate redundant development costs, optimize new product and service development resources, and share IT development and training expenses. Throughout our corporate restructuring, we will expand efforts to share and spread innovative ideas, management methods and quality programs.

\* All our businesses enjoy strong potential for growth, especially Food and Management Services. We need to focus on organic growth, whose return on investment exceeds 50 percent. In-depth strategic studies undertaken in France, Italy, the US and the UK are helping us to increase sales and earnings faster. They are also providing methodologies that will be transferred to other countries. Thanks to steady, predictable growth in cash flow, we will recover our full investment capacity in a little more than three years and be able to make new acquisitions.

\* The current year will be one of transition. Based on currently available data and in light of the capital increase, earnings per share should increase by approximately six percent in fiscal year 1997/1998. Over the next three fiscal years, earnings per share, after amortization of goodwill, are expected to grow by an average 20 percent a year.

Since our Company was founded in 1966, it has grown into an international enterprise, but its strategic mission has remained the same:

- First, to continuously improve client and customer satisfaction. This means listening carefully to their needs, diversifying our food services, developing a comprehensive offering of other services, and pursuing our strategic commitment to quality and innovation.
- Second, to develop our human capital. We encourage the emergence of entrepreneurs by decentralizing decision making and responsibility. We instill a corporate culture in that recognizes individual performance at all levels. We want all our team members around the world to take pride in belonging to the Sodexo Alliance community.
- Third, to meet the expectations of our shareholders. This means increasing earnings per share, keeping you informed and, to the extent possible, getting you involved in the ongoing development of your Company.

I am convinced that the mutual bond of loyalty and trust between our customers, our employees and our shareholders will secure our sustainable development long into the future.

In today's global marketplace, we derive important competitive advantage from our independence, our global reach, the quality of our teams, and our excellent financial position.

As you can see, our outlook is favorable. On behalf of the Board and myself, I would like to thank all of our many associates, whose professionalism, dedication and efficiency are each day helping to ensure Sodexo Alliance's success around the world.

Pierre Bellon

**DIVIDENDS**  
The dividend for fiscal year 1996/1997 has been increased 35 percent to FRF 35.00 before associated tax credit (FRF 52.50 including tax credit). It will be paid on March 5, 1998. Total payout amounts to FRF 263 million, corresponding to 49 percent of consolidated net income less minority interests.

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For further information, please contact: Raphaël DUBOULE - Corporate Secretary  
Phone: +33 1 30 85 74 74 - Fax: +33 1 30 85 05 05 - Internet: <http://www.sodexo.com>

## Virgin's tilting trains herald railway travel of the future

Randeep Barmah  
Transport Correspondent

A £1.85bn order for a new generation of tilting trains on Britain's railways could shrink the journey time between London and Birmingham to little more than an hour, according to plans unveiled by Virgin Trains yesterday.

The company's plans for more than 130 new trains coupled with a £2bn upgrade on the West Coast service between London and Scotland will cut more than a third off some journey times for its 23 million passengers.

The first trains go into service in 2000 and two years later Virgin aims to have its full fleet up and running.

By 2005 the time taken from London to Glasgow will be cut from 5 hours 20 minutes to 3 hours 50 minutes. On the Cross-Country service the trip from Birmingham to Bristol will



Mr Branson with a model of the train Photograph: David Rose

come down from the current 1 hour 27 minutes to 1 hour eight minutes by 2003.

The most ambitious proposals, for the company's West Coast route, would see 55 new trains capable of 160mph traversing the line from London to Scotland. More than 1,000 British jobs at GEC Alsthom's Washwood Heath facility in Birmingham will be secured by the announcement.

Another £850m will be spent on 77 trains – 43 of which can tilt – for the company's Cross-Country franchise.

Virgin said the twists and turns of the network meant that tilting trains – manufactured by Canadian firm Bombardier – were the only way to bring down travelling times.

Richard Branson, chairman of Virgin Group, said the train deals would herald nothing less

than a "revolution in long-distance travel by rail in Britain."

Mr Branson is keen to dispel doubts about his train service, which suffered last year from poor punctuality.

"We are now seeing 90 per cent of services running on time," said Mr Branson, adding that passenger numbers were "up 13 per cent in 11 months".

With a billion-pound stock-market flotation planned this summer, Virgin need to placate some City analysts who remain sceptical of the company's ability to persuade passengers to use its trains. Virgin already have a deal with Railtrack, owner of the nation's track and signalling, to spend £2bn on the dilapidated West Coast. But Brian Barrett, Virgin Trains' chief executive, said a possible further upgrade could see trains travelling at 160mph – which would reduce the 1 hour 40 minutes from London to Birmingham to less than 60 minutes.

## M&S victory over child labour libel

By Rob Brown  
Media Editor

ST MICHAEL'S halo was restored yesterday when Marks & Spencer won an apology and £50,000 libel damages from Granada Television in the High Court.

The ITV station was also ordered to contribute £650,000 towards the retail giant's legal costs over a *World In Action* documentary which alleged that M&S knew of child exploitation in a Moroccan factory used by a supplier and misled customers by selling foreign-made garments labelled "Made in the UK".

Granada accepted the verdict and made an unreserved apology. But it claimed later that the central thrust of the documentary, transmitted in

January 1996 and entitled "St Michael: Has the halo slipped?", had not been discredited by the ruling.

Charles Trenayne, controller of factual programmes, said the programme had proven that some 13 and 14-year-olds were employed in the factory and that a consignment of pyjamas made there had been mislabelled "Made in the UK" by its Northern Ireland-based supplier, Desmonds.

"We never intended to give the impression that M&S knew of these practices and we don't accept that the programme gave such an impression," he said.

Sir Richard Greenbury, chairman of M&S, said: "We will always take firm action to protect our reputation."

## Terms of endearment fall foul of PC Britons

EXPRESSIONS such as "love", "duck" or "chuck" are politically incorrect and should be outlawed, according to a survey released yesterday.

Almost half the 1,000 people questioned said they objected to being called "dear" by people they met on a formal basis – such as dentists, receptionists and tradesmen.

But 72 per cent of those questioned did not feel the same way about their use by nurses and said they were happy for staff in caring professions to use pet names.

According to the poll, carried out by NOP Solutions for *Bella* magazine, bosses and police officers were strongly criticised for using terms of endearment.

The strongest objections to

pet names were women, especially 15- to 24-year-olds.

A total of 63 per cent in that age group said they were offended by tradesmen calling them "love".

This compares with 36 per cent of women over the age of 65 who are generally more tolerant, the survey found.

Several organisations have already banned their staff from using pet names. Staff at Kings Mill Hospital, Sutton in Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, have been banned from using pet names to address patients.

And switchboard staff at Leeds Council must not address callers as "love", even though *Bella's* survey shows that Yorkshire people were the least likely to be upset by the use of this term.

# Wonder wake-up pill aids alertness

By Jeremy Laurance  
Health Editor

A WAKE-UP pill that increases alertness and boosts memory in people who are sleep-deprived was launched yesterday. It is more effective than coffee but lacks the side-effects of amphetamine-based stimulants. But it will not be available to party-goers, students or armies preparing for a long march - yet.

Modafinil is a new pharmacological compound with a unique effect on the brain that is not fully understood. It has been licensed in the UK as a treatment for narcolepsy, a rare disorder marked by an intense and overwhelming need to sleep that can strike at any time. Surveys show a third of people get less sleep than they need, which is blamed on the invention of electricity. By extending the waking day, modafinil could provide the pharmaceutical equivalent of the electric light bulb.

Unlike amphetamines, which stimulate the nervous system, modafinil appears to target the hypothalamus, the area of the brain thought to be responsible for wakefulness. Tests in normal volunteers have shown it boosts cognitive performance, especially memory, and reaction times in the sleep-deprived.

Its main advantage over amphetamines is that it does not produce the euphoria associated with those drugs and is thought not to be addictive. Yet tests on normal volunteers show it can keep people going through the night without causing rebound depression or sleepiness.

Dr Colin Markland, medical director of Cephalon UK, which is marketing the drug, to be called Provigil, in Britain, said there were no plans to explore its potential as an alertness pill.

"All our activities have been in the area of narcolepsy. If we wanted to seek another indication for the drug we would have to go back and con-

duct other studies." Military organisations in France, where the drug was first licensed in 1994, the US and Britain are understood to have shown interest. There would be an obvious military advantage in a pill that could help armies fight through the day and march through the night.

Dr Markland said that in the four years the drug had been available in France there had been no evidence of abuse but this would be monitored in Britain. It is available on prescription only and costs £60 for 30 tablets of 100g.

The normal dose for treating narcolepsy would be 200g to 400g a day, costing up to almost £3,000 a year. If proved safe and effective, modafinil might become a treatment for jet-lag or for disrupted sleep caused by shift work. But by far its biggest potential market could be in the treatment of insomnia - by preventing sleep during the day and thus promoting it at night.



Rescued from addiction: Graham Hardy ended up in a clinic after the original treatment for his narcolepsy Photograph: David Mitchell

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**Q. Tinted glass, a possibility?**  
**A. Tinted glass, a certainty.**

**Q. FINANCE... WHAT'S YOUR BEST?**  
**A. How about 2 Years' 0% Finance?**

**Q. How about metallic paint? Blue, or pearlescent Diablo Red?**  
**A. I'd also like front fog lights, standard! Or a 1.1 'D'.**

**Q. Does it have power steering?**  
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## It's hard to beat but I'm starting to get there now

GRAHAM HARDY was given a hard time by his teachers, Jeremy Laurance writes. When he fell asleep in class they would berate him for staying up too late. "Everyone thought I was lazy," he said.

Later, on a first aid course, he dropped off each time he sat down. He would wake a few minutes later, often without realising he had been asleep. A friend said he was the most laid-back person he had ever met.

He was finally diagnosed, at the age of 17, after his GP referred him to hospital in Glasgow. Doctors told him he had narcolepsy and prescribed amphetamines to keep him awake.

The attacks of overwhelming sleepiness, which usually last 10 to 15 minutes, can occur in the middle of a meal or when sufferers are walking in the street. Although frequently treated as a joke, it is a disabling condition which interrupts studies, makes work impossible and destroys relationships.

At first the drugs helped. Then he got used to them and had to increase the dose. "You need more and more and more. I was never given a break from them as I should have. I became addicted." He finished up in a clinic having to be weaned off the treatment.

Mr Hardy transferred to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary which specialises in treating narcolepsy and for the past eight months has been taking modafinil as part of a trial. Now 27, he says: "It is nothing like amphetamine. You take them and that is that - there is no high. The fact that they are non-addictive makes me feel easier."

Although he still has to take the occasional nap during the day he says he feels more active. In the past he has been unable to hold on to jobs but he hopes to start a university course in the autumn. "It used to take a lot to get me out. It's hard to fight and hard to beat but I am starting to get there now," he said.

## 2,000 porn images seized from Net

By Glenda Cooper  
Social Affairs Correspondent

MORE than 2,000 images of child pornography were removed from the Internet over the last year after complaints to the British industry watchdog, the Department of Trade and Industry announced yesterday.

In the first annual report from the industry-funded Internet Watch Foundation, the body said it had received 781 complaints referring to 4,300 items on the Net in the 12 months since it established a complaints hotline.

The reports were mainly about child pornography (85 per cent) with small proportions - about seven per cent each - covering matters such as financial scams, adult pornography, racism and malicious e-mails.

Only a small proportion of the items originated in the UK with the majority coming from the US (63 per cent), Japan (19

per cent) and Europe (11 per cent).

Public complaints had resulted in a number of prosecutions in Britain, but the exact number is not known as police records do not differentiate between child pornography on the Internet and that which is produced through traditional means.

The IWF acknowledges that the amount it catches is just a "very small proportion" of the total available on the Internet.

The foundation is working on software which can find sites likely to contain illegal material and IWF chairman David Kerr said he hoped within 18 months they would have developed free software which would help parents regulate what children had access to.

The DTI minister Barbara Roche welcomed the work done by the IWF and announced a Government review aimed at widening its role.

## DAILY POEM

### Hands of the Country

By Mike Harding

As she sat in her chair staring in the fire  
I traced my four years finger along the roads  
Of her hands, the valleys between the knuckles,  
The hills of bone that rose

Over the slack satin-skinned plains.  
I travelled with my child's touch  
Along the byways of those old veined  
Hands, following, without knowing it

Lanes that would lead down all the days  
To the hand that holds the pen  
Mapped now with the tracks and ways  
Of my own far country.

"Hands of the Country" comes from *Crystal Set Dreams*, the second collection by the travel and children's writer Mike Harding, who is also well-known as a folk singer and comedian. *Crystal Set Dreams* (£7.95) is published by Peterloo Poets, 2 Kelly Gardens, Calstock, Cornwall PL18 9SA.

صباح من الامل

# Young dance company faces unhappy ending

David Lister looks  
at the funding  
crisis facing an  
innovative group

AN innovative dance company bringing 10- to 14-year-olds on to the West End stage will have to cancel all productions next year because of lack of funds.

The plight of London Children's Ballet, the result of one woman's dedication to young people's dance, highlights the crisis in the arts and the way that *The Independent's* campaign could help to alleviate it.

Artistic director Lucille Briance formed the company five years ago. A journalist, she had worked on *Esquire* and *Vogue* magazines and founded a movie magazine in New York. She set up the London Children's Ballet because her 10-year-old daughter had wanted to audition for The Royal Ballet School, but Mrs Briance said no, thinking there should be a company that allows children to dance but also to pursue other interests and academic work.

The LCB auditions more than 400 children a year from 151 ballet schools, mainly after-school and Saturday morning classes. Their productions have been sell-outs, and in May they make their debut on the West End stage at the Peacock

SAVE  
THE  
ARTS

Theatre in a new production of *Mrs Harris Goes To Paris*, based on a book by Paul Gallico.

But next year there will be no production. The LCB receives no public funding. Mrs Briance said: "The Arts Council's dance department told me 'no, you come under education', the education people told me I was dance. Two applications for lottery funding have been turned down. Yet, in order to make this special experience open to children from every background, the company does not charge for the 100 hours of tuition given over the five-month rehearsal period."

"The many families who cannot afford the £14,000-a-year for the Royal Ballet School and prefer their children to have a more rounded childhood have found the company a god-send."

The company gets some business sponsorship, but has a shortfall of £31,000 and will not be able to mount a production next year. "I can see this cycle

never ending," said Mrs Briance. "I support *The Independent* campaign 100 per cent. I can't tell you how many people have told me there isn't an incentive to give to the arts. And I know that an incentive such as tax relief for individual donations would help us enormously."

*The Independent* and *Independent On Sunday* are campaigning for the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to use his Budget on 17 March to make all donations to the arts tax deductible. This would create a climate of giving in the United Kingdom - giving more and more people incentives to help their favourite arts companies.

We have been inundated with support from readers and from celebrities in the arts. Latest supporters include the *Absolutely Fabulous* star Joanna Lumley and Mark Elder, the conductor and former music director of the English National Opera, who telephoned from Munich where he is conducting Tippett's *A Midsummer Marriage*, to give his support.



The last dance: Members of the London Children's Ballet rehearsing for their show, *Mrs Harris Goes to Paris*, which will be performed at the Peacock Theatre, in the West End of London, in May

## Police to reinstate woman inspector

A WOMAN police inspector who was victimised after she lodged a complaint of sex discrimination is to be reinstated.

All outstanding disciplinary charges against Dena Fleming are being dropped and her suspension is being lifted, Lincolnshire Police said yesterday.

A friend of Inspector Fleming, who has two children, said she wanted to return to work. "She intends to be a police officer again," the friend said.

An industrial tribunal in Nottingham last week delivered a 96-page judgment on the affair after a two-year hearing. It rejected Inspector Fleming's allegations of sex discrimination but ruled she had been victimised.

The force's chief constable, Peter Bensley, who was singled out for criticism by the tribunal, is due to retire at the end of May. Last Friday he was questioned by members of Lincolnshire Police Authority.

It is thought the decision to reinstate Inspector Fleming was taken by Deputy Chief Con-

stable Phil Davies, who is in charge of disciplinary matters.

The authority also considered an inquiry into the case by the chief constable of Humberside, Tony Leonard. His report, which is covered by public interest immunity (PII) and has not been made public, is thought also to criticise Mr Bensley.

Gillian Merron, Lincoln's MP, has said she will ask the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, to place the report in the House of Commons library - a way to circumvent the PII. Miss Merron said it was vital that grievance procedures were seen to be fair. She criticised the costs of the case - estimated at between £350,000 and £500,000.

The tribunal was told Inspector Fleming was suspended after planting a tape recorder to record the alleged discrimination at Gainsborough police station. She said the problems began after she was forced to implement changes to the predominantly male shift - who resented her because she was a woman.

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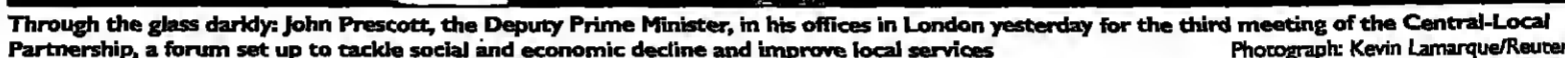
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**By Anthony Bevins**  
Political Editor

The new work included pro-

Mr Clark said he had no direct responsibility for hospitals, and that Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health, had written to them separately, asking to be kept informed of progress.



**By Anthony Bevins**  
Political Editor

He effectively warned William Hague that if the lead-

As for Mr. Hague's plans to put such the issue to a vote of party members, Mr. Clarke said: "There is no point in having a ballot of all members of the par-

**By Nicholas Schoon**  
Environment Correspondent

The practice makes a mockery of European Union at-

The new rules which the Government is consulting on cover vessels over 20 metres long, a minority of the UK fishing fleet, but responsible for more than half the total fish landed. They will have to land their fish at 32 ports, mostly in Scotland, during certain hours.

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**7th March**

## COMPUTER SYSTEMS

صَبَّحْنَا مِنَ الْإِصْحَالِ



# Rivals woo President to become India's PM

By Peter Popham  
in Delhi

WITH most results from India's general election declared, the nation is once again confronted by monumental uncertainty, from which only criminals and opportunists will profit.

The Hindu nationalist BJP has improved its standing dramatically since the last election, taking, along with its allies, 37 per cent of the vote nationwide and more than 250 seats. But this is still 20 seats short of an overall majority.

Meanwhile, Congress has also improved on its former position, and with its allies holds around 166 seats.

The two groupings will each now work furiously to persuade President K R Narayanan - whose role is very similar to, and derived from, that of the Crown in the British system - that they deserve to form the next government.

The BJP will do this by recruiting as many of the 20-plus independent MPs as it can. The Congress is already negotiating with the third force, the United Front, about forming a coalition government.

But the decision is the President's alone. He is more than likely to take a punt on the BJP and its venerable candidate for prime minister, Atal Vajpayee.

He will be predisposed in their favour because the BJP is the largest single party, and although it has entered into some unlikely alliances for a national party - with secessionist Sikhs, old-fashioned Socialists and the former film star, Jayalalitha, who has been in prison facing massive corruption charges - these connections were cemented before the elec-

tion, giving them a certain respectability.

Congress and the UF will have a tougher job impressing him, conversely, because they have made such a hash of things over the past 18 months.

In that arrangement the UF ran the government while Congress propped it up from outside, rather like a flying buttress.

The upshot was two brief, frail premierships, both brought down by Congress.

This time Congress wants to run the government as the dominant partner in a conventional coalition.

Whatever Mr Narayanan's decision, India is in for another debilitating bout of horse-trading from which, as the recent farcical realignments in the Uttar Pradesh state legislature demonstrated, the main beneficiaries will be those politicians rootless and slippery enough to slither from one party to another at short notice.

The victim again will be the Indian nation and people, hounded with another spatchcock government.

The fortunes of the main parties have varied wildly from state to state. In Uttar Pradesh Congress was exterminated, even at Amethi, long known as the "pocket borough" of the Gandhi-Nehru family.

But in Maharashtra, the bridges built by Congress leader Sharad Pawar to Dalits ("Untouchables") and Muslims dealt the BJP's sinister regional ally Shiv Sena a crippling blow.

Also in Uttar Pradesh, Indian romantics will be sorry to learn, the "Bandit Queen" Phoolan Devi has lost her seat after a rocklessly indolent first term.



Making moves: Sharad Pawar, of the Congress Party, is widely being projected as the front runner to be India's next prime minister  
Photograph: Reuters

# S. Korea's hopes for unity dashed

By Richard Lloyd Parry

KIM DAE JUNG knows better than anyone that Korean politics is an unforgiving business but, for a few hours at least, he had his hopes.

A week ago, before the 45,000 strong crowd which flocked to the National Assembly for his inauguration as South Korean president, he made an appeal to his parliamentary opponents. "We will never be able to overcome today's crisis without co-operation from you," he said. "[You] must help me if only for one year - this year - when the nation is standing on the brink of disaster."

If the new president saw any real prospect of cross-party co-operation, he has been rudely disappointed in the last week.

A few hours after his speech, the opposition Grand National Party (GNP) rejected his choice of Prime Minister by boycotting the vote; on Monday opposing MPs were seen on national television shoving one another in the Assembly over the same issue.

With a bit of constitutional legerdemain, President Kim yesterday managed to form a cabinet, but his choice of prime minister has still not been fully endorsed, and he faces continuing political agony.

Mr Kim's troubles emphasise that his moral authority - as a lifelong democrat and former political prisoner - is far stronger than his political mandate.

Central to his troubles, and symptomatic of his weak position, is Kim Jong Pil, another veteran politician and the president's nominee for the premiership.

Yesterday, President Kim named a cabinet, but the best he could do for Kim Jong Pil was to name him as "acting prime minister", a decision which was immediately challenged by the opposition.

Without the support of Kim JP, Kim DJ (as they are respectively known) could never have won the presidency.

Even with the support of his partner's United Liberal Democrats (ULD), his majority was barely one per cent and, throughout the campaign, he made it clear that JP would be his prime minister.

This is despite the fact that, throughout their lives, the two have been on diametrically opposed political sides. Kim Jong Pil is best known for founding the notorious Korean CIA which arrested, tortured and attempted to kill the new president on several occasions.

The GNP, whose own presidential candidate was defeated by the alliance of the two Kims but which retains its parliamentary majority, has been milking this inconsistency for all it is worth.

As a one-time prime minister and associate of former military dictators, and lacking economic expertise, JP is an appropriate premier for a modern Korea, they argue.

All this might be convincing if it were not for the fact that the GNP itself, several years and changes of names ago, was itself the party of these same generals.

Some within the GNP acknowledge this, indeed their reluctance to allow a straightforward vote appears to stem from a fear that it will expose divisions and encourage defections.

# No quick fix, Suharto told

By Richard Lloyd Parry

THE FORMER US vice-president, Walter Mondale, warned President Suharto yesterday that there are no "quick fixes" for the economic crisis ravaging Indonesia, and that the country's only hope is to push through the reforms which it has agreed with the International Monetary Fund.

"I came... with the basic purpose of seeing to it that the United States, and others working with Indonesia, see [through] the implementation of these IMF guidelines, the restoration of confidence and the stability that's crucial to this country," said Mr Mondale, who arrived on Monday as the personal envoy of President Clinton.

State Department officials have made it clear, however, that the US will not suggest that Suharto declines the re-nomination as president that is expected to be made next week.

In the last few weeks, Mr Suharto has been trying with the idea of stabilising the rupiah by pegging its value to the US dollar, an idea which is regarded with alarm by the IMF. Last week, White House officials were reported anonymously as saying that the US would oppose the next stage of the IMF's \$43bn (£27bn) bail-out package, if such a step was taken.



Walter Mondale: Warning

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# Actress's finale silences mobile phone menace

THE National Theatre actress Maureen Beattie, who is playing the role of Iago's wife in a production of *Othello* in Hong Kong, has emerged as a heroine in the struggle against excessive use of mobile phones, writes Stephen Vines.

Following a particularly grievous outbreak of mobile phone calls during a National Theatre performance at the Hong Kong Arts Festival, Miss Beattie took it upon herself to berate the audience after a final curtain call. "Everyone

cheered, I could not get them to stop," she said.

Few artistic performances in Hong Kong get away without the menace of mobile phone interruption. Cinema-goers not only receive calls, they also make them during parts of the

film they regard as rather slow moving.

The theatre where *Othello* was playing is now considering requiring patrons to check in their mobile phones in the same way that cameras and tape recorders are taken in.

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# Flicker of hope for Britons held in Chechnya

By Phil Reeves  
in Moscow

THERE was a flicker of hope last night, albeit frustratingly slender, for two British hostages who have been held in Chechnya for more than seven months.

Quoting an unnamed source in the capital, Grozny, Russia's Interfax news agency said that Jon James, 37, and Camilla Carr, 40, may be freed before a four-day trip to London by the Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov, which begins next Monday.

The grizzled Chechen leader, a former military commander, had pledged to "mobilise the whole might" of his enforcement agencies to secure their release, it said. Among those efforts is an appeal broadcast on Chechen television from the British ambassador to Moscow, Sir Andrew Wood.

The couple were abducted by six masked gunmen last July after arriving in Grozny to help children traumatised by the republic's 21-month war with Moscow. For months, the Foreign Office discouraged publicity for their plight, arguing that this

could drive up any ransom demand. But its stance softened as their incarceration dragged on.

Pressure for openness was stepped up when former Beirut hostages Terry Waite and John McCarthy rallied to their families' assistance. Last month the two men attended a well publicised 40th birthday party for Ms Carr in London.

Information about the couple's condition has been scarce, although two weeks ago the Chechen prime minister, Shamil Basayev, said that British diplomats have been given a video of the couple in which

they requested warm clothes. The experience of other hostages seized in Chechnya - which has seen an epidemic of abductions in the last 18 months - suggests that the conditions are harsh. The British embassy in Moscow has refused to comment on the existence of a video, admitting only to receiving "different indications that the hostages are alive".

Yesterday's Interfax report implied that the couple may be freed as the Chechen authorities want to remove "all irritants" in the relations with London - a view that is based on the optimistic as-

sumption that Mr Maskhadov has sufficient clout to secure their release. Despite his attempts at a crack down, kidnappings have continued apace, often in search of six-figure ransoms.

One issue is certain, though. Mr Maskhadov will visit London in an unofficial capacity as Britain does not recognise Chechnya's independence and is only willing to treat him as the leader of a Russian republic. But he will face a barrage of questions about the couple's safety.

■ Boris Yeltsin tried a new move in his long, and so far fruitless, efforts to reform

Russia's chaotic military yesterday by appointing a new head of his policy-making Security Council, and shaking up his defence agencies.

Andrei Kokoshin, 52, a former chief of the Defence Council, was appointed to replace Ivan Rybkin, a key intermediary in negotiations with the Chechens, who has been placed in charge of relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States after a government reshuffle.

Mr Yeltsin has also scrapped his once powerful Defence Council in the hope of coordinating military reform and policy.

## Cook to join fray in Serbia

By Andrew Gurnell

WESTERN governments yesterday piled pressure on Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav President, to help find a way out of the ever-growing hostilities between Serb police and the Albanian majority in the southern Serbian province of Kosovo.

The Foreign Office said that Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, was planning to travel to Belgrade, and possibly the Kosovo capital Pristina, on behalf of the European Union on his way back from today's visit to Bosnia. Last night diplomats were arranging meetings with Mr Milosevic and with Albanian leaders from Kosovo.

As Kosovo's Albanian community buried more than 20 people killed by Serbian police in "anti-terrorist" raids on private houses over the weekend - the worst incident since the province lost its autonomy from Belgrade nine years ago - Mr Milosevic was singled out by European and US officials as the man who needs to give way if a solution is to be found to one of the Balkans' most intractable ethnic conflicts.

"President Milosevic knows very well that the United States will not tolerate violence and that violence will lead to the toughest consequences imaginable. It would spell the end of his government, beyond the shadow of a doubt," warned Richard Gelbard, the US special envoy to the Balkans, who just a week ago visited Kosovo in an attempt to start dialogue between the opposing parties.

The European Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Hans van den Broek, expressed similar sentiments. "The clock is ticking and it is almost 12 o'clock," he said. "We feel very clearly that President Milosevic bears very great responsibility in this respect."

The tough words from international officials reflected their concern that Kosovo could spiral rapidly out of control. Although the Albanian leadership favours non-violent protest and negotiation with Belgrade to re-establish autonomy within Yugoslavia, the situation has been pushed to crisis point by the emergence of an armed guerrilla group, the Kosovo Liberation Army, that intends to fight for outright independence.



Bare facts: Two women viewing Henri Matisse's *Nude With White Drapery* at the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The piece is part of a collection on loan to the Hermitage from Copenhagen and is being shown in its entirety outside Denmark for the first time. Photograph: Alexander Demianchuk/Reuters

## German army hit by leap in neo-Nazi incidents

By Imre Karacs in Bonn

THE number of neo-Nazi incidents discovered in the German army quadrupled last year, the Bundeswehr's ombudswoman reported yesterday. Compared to 44 cases in 1996, there had been 177 manifestations of right-wing extremism in 1997, causing "unquestionable harm".

In her annual survey, Claire Maricfield said 229 soldiers

were investigated for neo-Nazi activities, including two lieutenants and 13 NCOs. "It is my impression that superiors and fellow soldiers reacted with sensitivity to such incidents, and took the appropriate steps," she wrote. Many cases involved nothing more sinister than soldiers listening to neo-Nazi CDs, unaware of the lyrics.

Ms Maricfield was scathing, however, about the Bundeswehr's "lack of distance" towards the tra-

ditions of the Wehrmacht. She was shocked to discover, during her visits to barracks, Nazi regalia on open display as part of historical collections, without an adequate explanation of their significance. Maps of the Third Reich and other period relics were shown alongside items from today's armed forces, suggesting some kind of continuity.

The ombudswoman was also unimpressed with the level of po-

litical awareness she encountered, complaining of "stunning ignorance" among some young recruits. The rise of right-wing extremism, she said, mirrored trends in society. But she added that officers were failing to grasp the opportunity to dispel some of the dangerous misconceptions that conscripts carry in their heads.

The military should improve courses in civic studies, she suggested in her report to Parliament.

Her report follows in the wake of a series of controversies engulfing the Bundeswehr. A special parliamentary commission is already investigating allegations of wide-spread neo-Nazi activities in the army. The sudden surge of recorded incidents may be due to growing awareness of the problem. But there is enough evidence to suggest that, after a period of decline, extreme right-wing tendencies are again on the rise.

## 20 arrested in Nigerian protest

LAGOS (Reuters) - Nigerian police arrested 20 protesters against the military ruler, General Sani Abacha, in Lagos. Witnesses said those arrested included Olu Aghakoba, leader of United Action for Democracy (UAD), who had called a march to counteract a huge rally in the capital Abuja to press General Abacha to transform himself into a civilian president. Police earlier used tear-gas to disperse the few dozen marchers waving placards who defied an official ban on the protest.

## Heir apparent

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg named his son Prince Henri as governor, the first formal step towards passing him the country's crown. "After mature reflection I think the moment has arrived to take a new step in the preparation of the future reign of our son Henri," the Grand Duke said in a letter to Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker published by the Luxembourg government.

## Strike hits Harare

HARARE (AP) - Zimbabwe's capital, where riot police posted on its outskirts, was eerily quiet as a nationwide strike took hold to protest government economic policies. The government previously warned it would send soldiers into the streets to quell any unrest during the two-day strike, which it asserted was being held illegally.

## Mir setback

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Cosmonauts broke three wrenches trying to open a hatch on the Russian Mir space station and had to abandon a spacewalk, Mission Control said. The failure, the latest in a series of problems on the 12-year-old Mir, left cosmonauts without an exit hatch to leave the station for spacewalks for at least several weeks. But they can still leave Mir in an emergency on the Soyuz escape capsule.

## Dog's bad name

DAR ES SALAAM (Reuters) - A dog named "Immigration" which was sentenced to death by a Tanzanian court for having an offensive name has been executed, local newspapers reported.

## When feeding frenzy comes, the piranhas dart in every direction

ADMITTEDLY, international dramas or events - a Gulf war, the collapse of a Berlin Wall, little upsets like that - cause greater herds of journalists to congregate. Other cities have large numbers of correspondents permanently accredited to report on government policy.

None the less, Brussels remains unique. Hundreds of journalists swirl around to report on every twist and turn of European Union policy. At noon every day comes the feeding frenzy, where the latest decisions are announced in several languages. But, in stark contrast to elsewhere, each of the piranhas is interested in different is-

### BRUSSELS DIARY



Steve Crawshaw

sues. In the White House press room, the dominant tone is national. CNN, Washington Post, Newsweek and Time are the guys that count. On Euro-stories, however, there are no nation-

al media. A decision about unfair steel subsidies may be remote for one country but front-page news elsewhere.

Only in one crucial respect is Britain different from all the other countries reporting on EU affairs. In Germany, Italy, Poland or South Korea, Europe is covered for its own sake; EU decisions are the subject of debate. But Britain continues to believe that Brussels is simultaneously much too important and almost irrelevant. Politicians still present reality through the prism of Westminster.

In recent months, British politicians like Gordon Brown have still seemed convinced that they can spin to their

hearts' content about British triumphs, leaving the Wacky Foreigners out of the loop. It is a fascinatingly futile view. Brussels is not just a bunch of foreigners; Brussels has become part of our lives.

In reality, there are two Brussels. There is Brussels (Europe) - at the heart of which stands the huge Berlaymont building, the former commission headquarters which is now covered in white sheeting like a creation by wrap-artist Christo, because of the dangers of asbestos. Meanwhile, gleaming new asbestos-free Euro-buildings pop up all around - a newly opened

parliament building here, an about-to-be-opened commission building there.

And then there is Brussels (Belgium). Town-and-gown conflicts are nothing, by comparison with Brussels' commission-and-country division. Euro-people indulge in Belgian chocolate, Belgian monks' (the much-heralded new Magritte exhibition, not the political process or the local highway code). Beyond that, the crossovers are few. A European official was asked how many Belgians she knew. "Not very many. Five or six," came the somewhat sheepish reply. "That many?" replied her Bel-

gian interlocutor, with no apparent irony. Integration may be a European dream. In Brussels, it has a long way to go.

Brussels is more than just a city of grey suits, that is for sure. A note from a Brussels resident, Mr Diawa, dropped through the letter-box last week, promising "important revelations about your life". Mr Diawa described himself as "chief of the grand sacred forest of Africa". He offers "effective protection in work and love, for slimming or getting fatter, for business". Above all, "if bad luck pursues you, I will help you with my great power - even for desperate cases."

If the EU gets into serious difficulties, Mr Diawa is clearly their man - especially since it won't be too expensive. He promises: "Success from the first visit."

Some Euro-successes have already begun. Restaurants have started marking their prices in euros, demonstrating Euro-patriotism and a belief in the new era. Even now, British politicians remain wary of the single currency. It is worth noting, however, that the "pragmatists" (sceptics) have had to give much more ground than the enthusiasts in recent years.

Perhaps, therefore, Brussels deserves a new hero. Belgium's best-known popular character (apart from the urinating fountain-figure *Manneken Pis*, who can even be eaten in dark chocolate) is the boy with the famous quiff and the little white dog. Distinguishing features: ineffable optimism in absurd circumstances, and he always succeeds in the end. Maybe Hergé's Tintin and Snowy should become the EU's very own mascots. Good for the dreamers' morale - and good for reconciliation between the decent but dull Euro-Belgians, on the one hand, and the unvarnished but real Belgo-Belgians next door.

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## Hang on, there's a noose vacancy

By Mary Braid

THE 15 convicted killers and armed robbers languishing on Swaziland's Death Row could be forgiven for getting a touch complacent about their appeals. It is 15 years since the country last carried out an execution.

But there is bad news, boys. Chief Maweni Simelane, the chief justice minister, has advertised in the local press for a "brave young man who has what it takes" to become the country's new hangman.

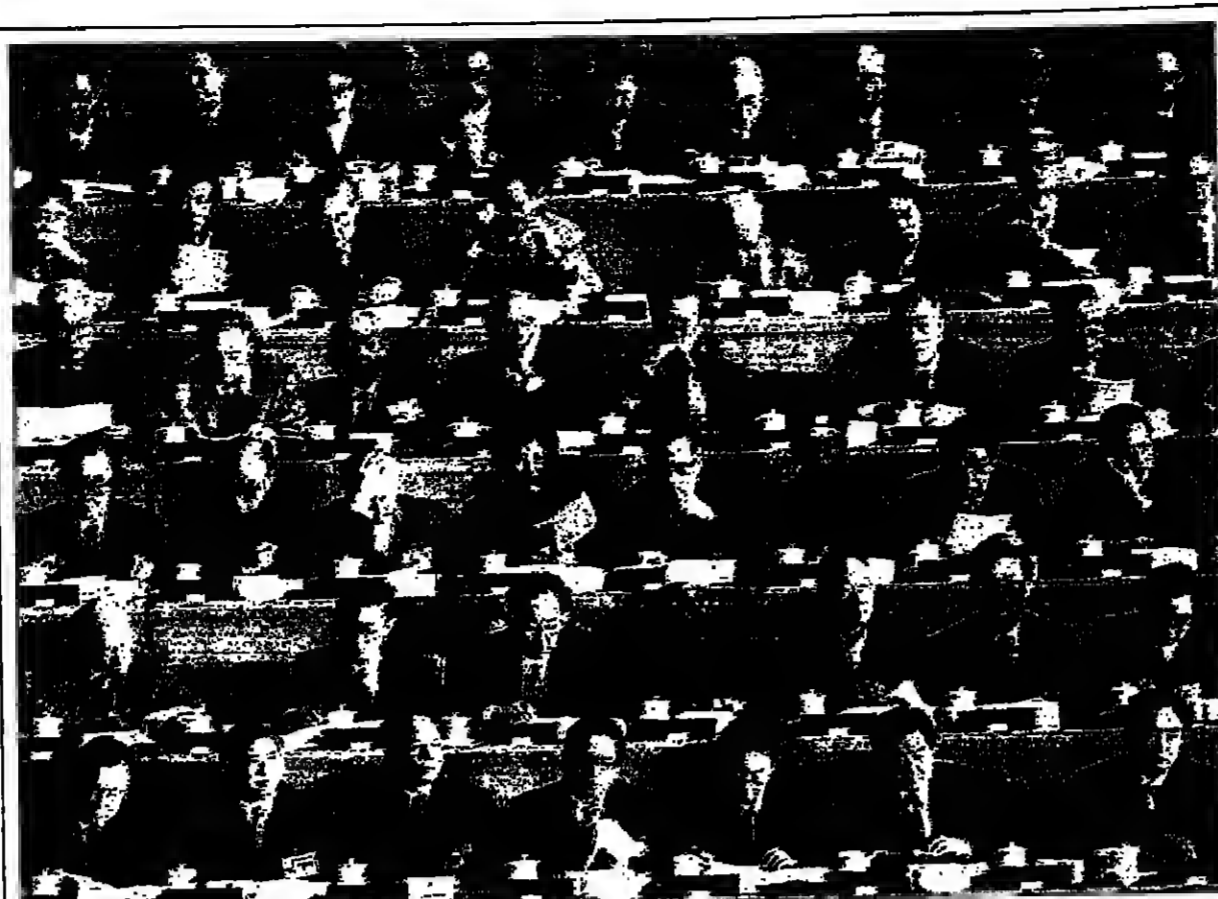
The official line is that if a country has a death sentence then, theoretically, it must have someone prepared to hang 'em high. But the development is a little ominous since Swaziland has managed perfectly well without an executioner since the mid 1980s when the then hangman - a South African - apparently threw in the towel, bored beyond endurance

by several nooseless years.

What has prompted the justice minister's quest for a hangman is unclear. He may be firing a warning shot over the heads of perpetrators or perhaps spearheading a right-wing campaign to persuade King Sobhuza II to get tougher on criminals. Since he came to power in 1986 at the age of 18 the king, who has final say on whether an execution can be carried out, has never sanctioned one.

Chief Simelane claims that the issue has been forced because of a sudden increase in the number of death sentences being handed down by courts.

"We've never actually officially dropped the practice [hanging] but no criminals were sentenced to death by our courts since the hangman ran off," Chief Simelane said. "It is just recently that the court have started imposing the death sentence again."



Reading the small print: Delegates at the Ninth National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, held in advance of a meeting of parliament in Beijing

Reuters

## Microsoft boss denies global monopoly

By Mary Dejevsky  
in Washington

A COOLLY insistent Bill Gates, chairman of the Microsoft Corporation and the richest man in America, denied yesterday that his company had, or sought, a monopoly of the computer software market or that it aspired to dominate the global information network, the Internet.

Mr Gates, trying hard to live down his reputation in Washington for arrogant disregard of the political establishment, was testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee at a special hearing held to consider the state of the computer industry.

"Microsoft does not have monopoly power in the business of developing and licensing computer operating systems," he told the committee, describing it as "preposterous" to think that any one company could control access to the Internet.

In an interview with the *Washington Post*, timed to coincide with the hearing, Mr Gates maintained that his company's ability to innovate could be endangered if its business was restricted. And "if we cannot innovate, then you know we will be replaced" as industry leader.

Yesterday's hearing, much of which was televised, had been keenly awaited as an opportunity for the political and legal arguments currently swirling around Microsoft to be aired in public. At issue is whether Microsoft's market dominance is a just reward for its innovativeness (as it claims) or an impediment to free competition that should be curbed (as its rivals claim). The might of the US computer industry - chief executives of Dell, Netscape, Sun Microsystems and others - turned up in person to testify.

While the Republican chairman of the Senate panel, Orrin Hatch, denied that the hearing was intended to vilify Microsoft, proceedings devel-

oped rapidly into an inquisition into Microsoft's market dominance. Its software is installed in 85 per cent of personal computers world-wide and accounts for 95 per cent of the software installed in PCs now sold.

In a graphic illustration of the state of the market, Jim Barksdale, president of Netscape Communications, one of Microsoft's main rivals, asked yesterday's audience how many used PCs (almost all); and then how many did not use Microsoft's Windows software (almost none). That, said Mr



Bill Gates: Internet control is 'preposterous' notion

Barksdale, was a monopoly, and he called for rigorous enforcement of US competition (anti-trust) legislation to deal with it.

Otherwise, he said: "Microsoft's abuse of its monopoly power ... will adversely affect the course of American commerce and communications in the information age."

In a lawsuit brought by the US Justice Department, Microsoft is accused of trying to consolidate its hold on the market for "browsers" - the software that controls access to the Internet. It is also accused of breaching a 1995 undertaking on competitiveness by imposing restrictive deals on its customers: computer-makers and Internet providers.

## French wine at US takeover

By John Lichfield  
in Paris

ONE of the biggest Californian wine producers has set up a company to produce American wine in France, or at least French wine with an American accent.

The project will please some wine producers in the Languedoc region, who can expect to sell up to 10 million bottles a year on the US market under the label of Robert Mondavi, the third largest producer in the Californian Napa Valley.

But the aim of Mondavi - to create a new variety of French wine which appeals to the American palate - will alarm many wine purists. There is already concern that some French wines, including expensive labels, are being debased to appeal to unsophisticated tastes.

Traditionally, French wine is supposed to draw its character from the subtleties of local topography and local production techniques - the very nature of "le terroir" (the soil).

French experts say that there is an increasing temptation among French producers to abandon this tradition and go for the evenness of quality and strength of taste of a typical American, or Chilean or Aus-

tralian wine. This depends on more intensive methods of wine-manufacture and boosts the importance of the type of grape used over the importance of the "terroir".

It appears to be precisely what Robert Mondavi intends to do with its new "Vichon Mediterranean" label: to apply American production methods to French raw materials. The plan is to create a range of French red wines - from £5 to £25 a bottle - "adapted to American tastes".

Whether or not American tastes are inferior to French tastes is a matter for endless argument. French experts say a typical American wine is "virile" rather than "subtle". As one defender of French wine heritage puts it, American wine "hits you in the palate like a thick layer of wine jam".

Robert Mondavi's venture is being driven partly by a shortage of American wine, following an outbreak of the phylloxera disease in vineyards in California. It is also intended to take advantage of a renewed fad for French red wine in the US.

Initially, Mondavi will purchase grapes from local French producers. Eventually it hopes to buy its own vineyards.

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# Slow death of the war children

Are the air raids of the Gulf war still claiming victims? Robert Fisk reports from the cancer ward of a Basra hospital

MATAR ABBAS is dying. In the corner of the cancer ward at the Basra teaching hospital, the wreckage of his emaciated body seems to mock the broad, pale blue Shatt al-Arab river outside the window. He has already lost an eye and is hawking mucus into a handkerchief, his scarf slipping from his head to reveal the baldness of chemotherapy treatment, part of his face horribly deformed by the cancer that is now eating into his brain. He comes from Nasiriyah, the city whose outskirts were shelled and bombed by the Allied forces in the last days of the 1991 Gulf war, the conflict that drove Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait.

His wife, Ghaniyah, wears an elaborate black chador. She is a peasant woman with tattoos on her face, and stayed throughout the war with Matar - a 60-year-old former taxi-driver with nine children - on the road between Amara and Misan. "We saw the flashes of the bombs but nothing was bombed near us," she recalled, speaking carefully as if her memory might somehow save her doomed husband. "We were safe." But Dr Jawad Khadim al-Ali begs to disagree. "We rarely saw these types of tumours before the war," he said, gently touching Matar's right ear.

Dr al-Ali smiles a lot, although - from time to time - you notice tears in his eyes and realise that he might also be a spiritually broken man. He looks a little like Peter Sellers, physically small with thinning hair and a drooping moustache. But there is nothing funny about his commentary. "Because of the tumour in his ear, Matar Abbas is now unable to talk or take food and is deaf," he said matter-of-factly. "He came for his first treatment only on January 16th, with a swelling and an inability to talk or drink. The biopsy showed cancer. I am giving him cytotoxic chemotherapy - but later on, the cancer will go



Ali Haidar in the Saddam Hussein City Hospital in Baghdad. Never did US strategists suggest that Gulf war bombings would lead to cancer

Photograph: Robert Fisk

to his brain and his lungs. He will probably live one year - not more."

The doctor led me across the room to where Zubeida Mohamed Ali lay, chadored, on her bed. She comes from Zubayr - close to the Iraqi air base that was saturated with allied bombs in a series of raids that started on the night of 13 February, 1998. "She has tumours of the lymph nodes and they have infiltrated her chest," Dr al-Ali said. "She is suf-

fering shortness of breath." Zubeida is 70.

Opposite lay 55-year-old Jawad Hassan, diagnosed with cancer of the stomach two years ago. He lived almost next to the Basra television station that was the target of Allied bombing. "He was exposed to fumes and bombs at his home," Dr al-Ali continued. "He was also close to the river bridges that were bombed. He is losing weight despite our

treatment, which makes his prognosis very bad."

The man, prematurely aged, looked at me with a blank expression. "Ever since I was exposed to the fumes of the bombings, I complained about pains in my abdomen," he said. The implications of what these cancer victims were saying was so terrible that I almost wished my visit had been a feeble attempt to set up a visiting journalist

with an easy-to-expose lie, a crude attempt by Saddam's regime to raise a grave moral question over the entire Gulf war.

But Dr al-Ali had no idea that we were visiting him until the moment we walked into his office. His patients did not expect visitors. And if some of them were - like so many cancer victims elsewhere in the world - elderly, what was to be made of the flock of men and women, young and

old, who were waiting outside Dr al-Ali's oncology department?

"It's a tragedy for me," Dr al-Ali said, pointing to a tall, handsome youth standing amid a group of women. "I'm losing friends every day - this boy has Hodgkin's lymphoma. This girl is suffering lung cancer." She was small, petite, with a big, smiling, moon-like face.

Another, Fawzia Abdul-Nabi al-Bader, was a 51-year-old English

teacher who walked into the department office and pulled her collar down to show a suture on her neck and then opened her blouse to show the scar where her right breast should have been. "Why should this have happened to me?" she asked. "My first operation was in 1993. Until that, my health was very good."

In his office, Dr al-Ali's maps tell their own story. "Number of cancer patients of all kinds in the Basra area," it says over a map of the Basra governorate, shod up into yellow, red and green segments. The yellow, mainly to the west of the city, represents the rural and desert areas from which few cancer patients come. A green area to the north indicates an average incidence of cancer. But a large blood-red rectangle in the centre stands for the almost 400 cancer patients whom Dr al-Ali had to treat last year alone. It is his thesis that the battlefields in the yellow area to the west contaminated the water, the fields, even the fish with depleted uranium and nitrate, contaminating the land not only for survivors of the war but for those still to be born.

Back in the last days of the conflict, United States strategists were debating whether the damage to Iraq's infrastructure - the bombing of water pipes, power plants and oil refineries - would take the lives of Iraqis in the months or years to come. But never did they suggest that a policy of bomb-now, kill-later would ever involve cancer.

In Baghdad, hundreds of children - most of them from the south - have died of leukaemia and stomach cancer since the war. Many were sent there by Dr al-Ali. "Everyone of us is in despair," he said in his Basra cancer ward. "It is a great burden on me - I am losing many of these patients every day. They need bone-marrow transplants but we cannot give them to them. I cannot sleep at night for thinking about them."

## Dusty farm ditches and disused trenches - the tomato plantations are still killing fields

By Robert Fisk in Rafidiyah, southern Iraq

AT FIRST glance, the Adwan family's tomato plantation doesn't look like a killing field. The polythene covers reflect the high, bright winter sun. And when I ask 16-year-old Imad Adwan what happened here during the Gulf war, he glances at the man from the Ministry of Information beside me and says he cannot remember. It pays, you see, to have a short memory in Iraq - and to lie.

As water trickles through the ditches between the rows of pale green bushes, a sharp wind blows out of the desert to the west, just as it did in February 1991, when Major General Tom Rhame's US First Infantry Division - the "Big Red One" - swept up the highway to Suwayn, shelling the retreating columns of the Iraqi Republican Guard. Imad Adwan is watching me to see if I have understood his amnesia.

Don't worry, the ministry man tells him, and produces an identity card. The boy grins. "The battles were all around us here - we didn't even stay in the house because we knew it would not give us cover. But we didn't leave. The wrecked tanks are over there." Far beyond the barbed wire surrounding the farm, beyond a stand of trees



and another plantation, the rusting victims of General Rhame's attack moulder in the damp earth. Imad's mother has appeared beside us, a scarf around her head, a black dress tugged by the breeze.

She is holding a pale green tomato in her hand. "Please," she says. "It is for you." The tomato is small, plucked from the bush in front of us, a poisoned fruit - according to the Basra doctors down the road - from a poisonous war, grown on a dangerous stem, bathed in fetid water. "The soldiers

died on this road," she says, pointing to the highway behind us which leads south-west towards Safwan and the Kuwaiti frontier. "The battles went on for hours. People still get killed - two boys were blown up by mines over there last July." The outline of a collapsed trench shows the fatal spot.

But it is other deaths that we have come about. Are the Adwans worried about their land? Do they know what the doctors say about it? That it could have been "infected" with radiation, contaminated by the depleted uranium and tank shells which Imad refused to remember when we arrived? She has heard of cancer cases in the farmlands but none in her family, thanks be to God.

It is then that Hassan Salman walks up to us. He grows tomatoes and onions on the other side of the road. He has a distinguished face, brown from the sun, and is wearing a gold-fringed robe. When we mention cancer, he frowns. "Yes, we have had many cancer cases here," he says. "I think it happened because of the fires and what happened during the battles. The tanks were just down the road." He pauses. "My daughter-in-law died of cancer around 50 days ago. She was ill in the stomach. Her name was Amaal Hassan Saleh. She was very young - she was just 21 years old."

## US sees 'green light' for use of force

UNITED NATIONS (AP) - A UN warning to Iraq of "severest consequences" if it breaks a deal to open presidential palaces gives Washington a "green light" to attack if Baghdad fails to honour the accord, the US ambassador said.

But most of the 15 members of the Security Council, which issued the warning on Monday, disagree with the US interpretation. Envoys from many countries, including long-time US allies, said that only the council has the authority to determine whether Iraq has breached the deal and if so what response would be appropriate.

That was the main obstacle to quick approval of a council resolution endorsing Secretary-General Kofi Annan's agreement with the Iraqis to open all sites, including eight presidential palaces, to UN arms inspectors.

Annan said if his deal holds,



All see US Ambassador Bill Richardson

"we will be moving on to a period when Iraq will complete its obligations and the council can begin thinking of lifting the sanctions" that were imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

In Washington, US President Bill Clinton hailed the agreement and called on Iraq "to turn the commitment it has made into full compliance."

Ambassador Bill Richardson told NBC-TV's "Today" show: "This gives us the green light to approach our policy of diplomacy and force and it shows to the world once again that the onus of complying with this agreement is with Iraq."

Except for Britain, few other council members share that interpretation. During Monday's vote, speakers from China, Russia, France, Costa Rica, Brazil, Portugal, Sweden and others said the decision on using force rests with the full council alone.

Diplomatic sources said several countries agreed to support the resolution only after receiving oral assurances from the co-sponsors - Britain and Japan - that the document did not constitute a "green light" for an automatic American attack.

Before the vote, China's UN ambassador, Qin Huasun, said Beijing had insisted "that there

must not be any automatic authorization of the use of force against Iraq in this current resolution."

"Our misgivings about the possible abuse of this resolution have not been removed," Qin said. "The passing of this resolution in no way means that the Security Council automatically authorizes any state to use force against Iraq."

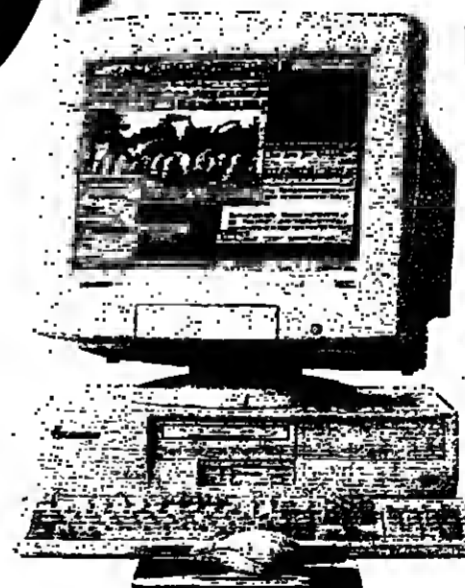
It appeared that the Iraqis were keenly aware of the divisions within the Security Council.

In Baghdad, Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf said the resolution was a mere "face-saving" measure for the United States but promised that Baghdad would not violate the agreement.

"If there is any real meaning in this resolution, then it is the adoption and the endorsement of the agreement", al-Sahhaf told Associated Press Television.

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# In a world of whose own?

She is an actress with a chameleon-like ability to swap accents, he is a writer whose work is anchored in his native Belfast. Together, they are on stage at the Donmar

ACTORS fall into two broad categories: those who play themselves and those who play other people. One type gets recognised in the street rather more than the other. Last year, while Lynda La Plante's *Trial and Retribution* was being screened, Helen McCrory found herself dragged into a pub debate about the moral issues thrown up by the series. "I assumed arrogantly that this conversation had been sparked off by the fact that they knew who I was. They asked me my opinion and I realised after about 10 minutes they had no idea."

You can see why. McCrory is currently at the Donmar in *In a Little World of Our Own*, a new play by Gary Mitchell in which she puts on an Ulster accent to play a born-again Christian in the heart of Protestant Belfast. In *Sound and Deliver*, a BBC film by Les Blair, she plays a feckless English photographer in Glasgow. In *The James Gang*, a road movie directed by Mike Barker, she's a Scot who fetches up in Wales. The Donmar play opens the theatre's annual "Four Corners" season: it sounds as if McCrory could play all four corners herself.

If this nomadism has a name, it's character acting. It may be too classic a connection, but it's worth noting that McCrory is the daughter of a Glaswegian diplomat and a Welsh physiotherapist who spent her childhood moving from Scandinavian pillar to African post. Her accent is pure English girls' boarding school (with a nicotine flavouring) although, with her wide, dark eyes and four-square Celtic bone structure, you can't see her wielding a lacrosse stick. She has got through most of her twenties without playing the love interest, unless you count *Nina* in *The Seagull* (at the National with Judi Dench).

For her most prominent leading role so far, in the BBC's hard-hitting *Streetlife*, she bleached her curls blonde and donned a Welsh accent to play a pregnant single mum on a grim Cardiff estate. She was next found up at the other end of the social map, as a surgeon's repugnantly ambitious daughter (alongside Ian Richardson) in *The Frigate Heart*. "If you're willing," she explains, "to have the same expectations of yourself that many male actors have - and many women actors deny themselves

by wanting to look sexy or pretty - then there are a lot of parts that are open to you. If there's one interesting thing about acting, it's trying to lose your ego in the character."

In *A Little World of Our Own* is McCrory's first stage role since *Les Enfants du Paradis*, Simon Callow's epic calamity at the Barbican. "They panned us," she says of the critics. "It was a very long show: people came with humfluff and left with grandchildren. It was one of those real clichés: in the rehearsal room, everybody was completely behind it; and when it came on to the stage, it was a big aircraft hangar and the staging really didn't help the play."

That experience was presumably one of the spurs that made McCrory take the rare step, at least among stage actors, of jointly starting her own company. Her mild dyslexia notwithstanding, she now has to read even more scripts than she would as an actress. In its first year, her company, named The Foundry, has helped mount four new productions, including *Neverland* by Phyllis Nagy at the Royal Court. In *A Little World of Our Own*, a busy thriller that has already won Gary Mitchell the "Best New Play" at the Irish Theatre award, meets all The Foundry's criteria.

"I wouldn't say it's a backlash against this new wave of young playwrights," McCrory says, "but you go and see their plays and say, 'Yeah, that's what I thought when I was 16. But I'm 28 and I don't really want to cut off half my brain in order to understand your writing.' Also a lot of plays are really TV plays or poems, but they're not theatrical. We talked to a lot of literary agents about the fact that we wanted to do conventional, well-crafted plays that are about something, aren't just sexy with lots of guns and sensationalism. It's fashionable and therefore transient and what's the point in doing them?"

The point of doing the BBC film *Stand and Deliver*, about a London stand-up (Phil Daniels) who does two gigs one weekend in Glasgow, was to spend four months in Glasgow working with writer-director Les Blair, whose working-method bears comparison with Mike Leigh's. There's a rambling, inconsequential feel to the piece, occasioned by Blair's refusal to deliver anything as staid as a plot that stands on its own two



Helen McCrory and Paul Hickey rehearse 'In a Little World of Our Own'

Photographs: Geraine Lewis

feet, but McCrory is delightfully kooky as an artistic butterfly of independent means.

Blair went through the laborious process of constructing a character with each actor "so you don't just end up playing yourself in Glasgow doing a different job. It takes a lot of balls to do that because there is no security there, there is no safe-

ty net. I spent my first few weeks thinking, what happens if nothing we come out with is of any interest to anybody?"

It was in a similar spirit of curiosity that she took the screen role of a whore who is bitten by Tom Cruise in *Interview with the Vampire*. "I wanted to see how a studio film works. It literally is. 'Mr Cruise will be on set in 60

seconds... Mr Cruise will be on set in 30 seconds... Mr Cruise is walking on set.' And was it forbidden, as rumour alleges, to look him in the eye? 'I wasn't told not to. We had a rehearsal the night before, after he and Mr Pitt had finished filming, and no, he was completely normal. I was doing *The Seagull* at the time, and he said, 'I hear you're do-

ing *The Seagull*, I'll try and come and see it.' (He didn't.) And how tall is he? 'Taller than me. But most seven-year-old children are taller than me.'"

Jasper Rees

*In a Little World of Our Own* opens 8pm tonight, Donmar Warehouse, Earlham Street, London WC2 (0171-369 1732).

I TAKE my hat off to Gary Mitchell. BBC Northern Ireland's local "opt out" channel has delivered some peculiar monsters in its time, but in *Red, White and Blue: A Protestant Experience* - an extraordinary TV documentary shown last month - the 32-year-old playwright from the "top end" of Rathcoole, that vast loyalist working-class estate just three miles north of Belfast, managed to lift the lid off the ordinary, everyday, true-blue culture of a people whom he obviously holds dear.

As in the 12 strongly worded radio plays he has written since 1990, Mitchell's subjects are unfailingly blunt: the beer-drinking culture of the Drumcree heano; family-man paramilitaries under threat of death; even a three-part drama on the touchy subject of the RUC.

"Sure, they're political plays," he says, "but, if that's part of life, why shouldn't it be part of a play? There's a kind of black comedy in the way someone says 'Oh, did ye hear they killed Billy Wright?' in between a conversation about going to get the shopping, and I'm afraid that's the way it is..."

A tense, eye-opening living-room whodunit about a UDA hardman, his mentally retarded brother and a menacing little paramilitary peace-broker, his 1995 break-through play, *In a Little World of Our Own*, opening tonight in a new staging at London's Donmar, probes the tit-for-tat implications of an unsolved sectarian atrocity. Set against the 1994 ceasefires, it's an allegory of the violently imposed order within a besieged community - "the mindset that believes the world ends at the red-white-and-blue-painted kerbstones on the way out of the estate".

Like all his work, it reveals a staunchly sceptical attitude to the sectarianism of the North. How does he get away with it? "Nobody hassles me," he says. "A long time ago, my family were big in the UDA, which was then a legitimate organisation and people thought very highly of it. When it became heavily criminalised in the late 1970s and 1980s, a lot of people, including my family, just walked away. But I've got nine uncles - all big guys - and you don't mess with them. My dad's the smallest one, and I'm the smallest of my family, so maybe that's the genetic line that's coming through. I was always the kid: I was heavily protected and, coming from such a big family,



Always blunt: Gary Mitchell

they couldn't hurt what or even me. People would expect certain things of you, but you just don't deliver. It's as simple as that."

Born into a Congregational family, Mitchell was educated locally. "We never learnt Irish history in school, it was all English history, geared towards the exams. I think that's why, when we meet Catholics and start arguing about history, we lose."

After long years on the dole, he spent a rough two years in the civil service. "You might say a monkey could have done my job but, honestly, monkeys are too creative. My bosses all seemed to think I was just scum, because I came from Rathcoole, and there were all these regulations, like not being allowed to wear red-white-and-blue. They even had a problem with my Crystal Palace mug. It was ridiculous, I couldn't cope."

Near desperation, he joined a drama group, began writing for the first time in his life, and wrote a stage play, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*. It was rejected by the group but quickly picked up by director Pam Brighton at the BBC, and he hasn't looked back since.

Despite his growing success, Mitchell still lives with his folks in Rathcoole. Since the Troubles, the population has dropped from 17,000 to 8,000, while the forced eviction of most of its Catholics has turned it almost 100 per cent Protestant. Mitchell has no intention of relocating, however, when he's not travelling with his work, he spends his time there, writing, hanging about.

"I love my family, so why should I go anywhere else? I love this place. I really do, and I think the people who leave are like rats deserting a sinking ship. I mean, there's a lot of work to be done here..."

Mic Moroney

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## Get it off!

Dave Simpson's hen-night comedy may succeed in pulling in the girls but, says Paul Taylor, it's still four pouches short of 'The Full Monty'

Back in their dressing-room, three male strippers are facing a stiff challenge. The remaining member of the quartet is a college student, so it stands to reason that he is able to locate the female clitoris without turning a hair. But can the others - given that one is a clandestine gay (Mau Healy), one (Damien Child) has been engaged for three years to a frigid shopaholic, and the last (Michael Magnat) is a preening pint-sized Mike Tyson (but without the delicacy and consideration). The student (Mark Prentice) executes a poster-sized sketch of the relevant area and the men gawp at it with all the gormless puzzlement of Ronald Reagan invited to find Nicaragua on a map of the world. When they each plump, their aim proves to be just about as bad as this show's.

Predating it and already into a fourth national tour, *Girls' Night Out* by Dave Simpson now struts into the West End clinging to the lunchbox of *The Full Monty*. Focusing on a northern working-class hen-night at the Feast of Flesh Club, it includes male strip routines (all choreographed by the director, Carole Todd) that, if they don't have the provincial charm of the "amateur" efforts in the hit

movie, are likeably good-humoured in their self-mocking parody of swollen-headed male prowess. Men in the audience will feel far less excluded than they did at, say, Cliff Richard's *Heathcliff* or at the recent *Women on the Verge of HRT*, where the spectacle of middle-aged females rushing to the stage to touch hands and teddies with ultra-safe middle-of-the-road performers made one have doubts about the human race in general.

A camera panning over a line of humourlessly hypnotised males, a drink in one hand and an itch in the other, is the standard screen method of presenting men watching women strip. On stage and off here, the predominantly female audience gets itself going, all right, but never stops seeing the funny side.

In a rather priggish programme note, Dave Simpson reveals that he was initially slightly wary of the subject matter and told his producer that, if he were to take on the project, "the dynamics of the play wouldn't be male stripping with surround scenes as wallpaper; it would be funny, with dramatic and character developments and, hopefully, with several layers, but - most importantly of all - written

from the women's point of view." It's fascinating to find that this was his intention, for what he has produced makes *Are You Being Served?* look as though it were scripted by George Eliot.

In addition to *The Full Monty*, a telling point of comparison is with Willy Russell's *Sixty and Hens*, a 1978 play (and later film) that also homes in on a gender-split prenuptial Northern knees-up. A measure of how liberated *Girls' Night Out* actually is can be gauged by looking at all three works' takes on the ticklish topic of public loos, those supposed bastions of male/female exclusivity.

In *The Full Monty*, a woman is viewed, by a man in hiding, having a raucous stand-up slash at a urinal in the Gents of a working men's club (there being so few working men now)

during an evening of Chippendale's-clip-off fun. It's an emblem of how enunciated the men feel ("I tell you, when women start pissing like us, we're finished") in a film where the women hold the economic power but, ironically, the actresses get much the inferior roles.

There's a political dimension in *Sixty and Hens*, too: here the mates of the drunken groom-to-be invade the Ladies to stop the bride-to-be from calling the wedding off. Trapped in the cruddy club with no conventional exit route, she, in turn, invades the Gents, smashes the window and escapes from a stunted life where even her female friends feel she's letting the side down. "What would happen if every woman did that, eh?" asks one of them. "Who'd be married today if we

all took notice of how we feel? eh? eh?"

By contrast, the loo in the apparently limitless accessible strippers' changing-room in *Girls' Night Out* is just the place where Damien Child's amusingly dimwit hunky-novice stripper noisily achieves congress with his normally-too-busy-shopping fiancée (Nicola Jeanne), who has been aroused by unwittingly witnessing his act. He's in a highwayman's mask at the time and it's only when his posing pouch comes adrift that she recognises him. Shades of President Clinton and those allegedly distinguishing marks? No, it's because it's shaped like a banana, which gives you some idea of the standard of single entendre on offer here. Even these are explained: "Sarah - I think I'm rigid!" "She means rigid!" Oh, right.

*Girls' Night Out* thinks it's hip because it allows one woman to kneecap a chauvinist pig in the balls and another to admit to not having had an orgasm until she was 50 (with an adulterous lover). It fails to see, by and large, that the females are (from the seven-month-pregnant ninny with a whine like a burglar alarm to "Miss MFI Bargain Hunter 1998") insulting stereotypes. Even allowing for the fact that one doesn't expect the Vassar Essay Society at a working-class hen night, the brains of Simpson's female creations seem (thanks to him, not to them) to be every bit as much between their legs as are the men's. The show lands some way wide of the G-spot.

To 2 May, Victoria Palace, Victoria Street, London W1. Booking: 0171-834 1317



From left, Michael Magnat, Christine Parle, Damien Child and Mark Prentice act up in 'Girls' Night Out' Photograph: Robin Watson

# The next big spring

For a fresh new look, focus on the latest from four British designers, says Fashion Editor Tamsin Blanchard. Pictures by Sheridan Morley

IT MAY not feel like Spring just yet, but on Planet Fashion the season is well on its way. Most women do not begin the season with a brand spanking new wardrobe; one key piece can be a treat. We have selected four designer looks – from four British labels – to get you into the mood.

It would not be spring 1998 without a mention of Alexander McQueen. You hear his name often enough, but what are his clothes actually like? They're not at all pointed shoulders and bum-hugging trousers. It's intricate cutting that makes his clothes so special. Accord-

is hosting a tea party for another label. Soll, at the end of the week. Berardi knows how to make a show-stopper – the Sicilian lace dress worn by Naomi Campbell for his show last October took 14 women, four months to make, and will be available to order, at a cost in excess of £14,000. But he can also make wearable clothes, including plunging V-neck sweaters in black, blue or baby pink, pleated mini skirts, and basket-weave tango dresses.

Food for thought: if you like your fashion a little more stark and intellectual, Belgium's Martin Margiela is the man. His



ing to Angela Quantrell, who buys his collection for Liberty, McQueen is bought by women who want something more than just a skillful bit of tailoring; they want to be noticed.

For something a little less formal, YMC is a two-year-old British label for both men and women, selling functional clothing – those in the know recognise the cool minimalism of a khaki YMC jacket or the unfussy cut of a pair of trousers.

If you want a tip for a new name, invest in a piece of Tristan Webber. This is his first collection since graduating from Central St Martin's and he is a name to watch. Browns bought Webber's graduation collection, selling it "to order" which means that they had a few select customers for his sleek and plaid leather in mind. This season he will reach a wider audience. Look out for sharply tailored red leather jackets with a split seam up the back.

Antonio Berardi is another St Martin's wunderkind who makes seriously sexy clothes. Backed by an Italian manufacturer, his clothes are beautifully finished. Fresh from his collection shown at London Fashion Week, Berardi has designed a leather collection for Italian company Ruffo which was presented in Milan last night, and

first collection for Hermes is unveiled in Paris next week. The leader of the deconstruction movement of the early Nineties, Margiela has turned clothes inside out, taken them apart and sewn them up again, and even unpicked the Stockman dress-making dummy and used it as the basis for a collection. For spring, Margiela has used the humble plastic carrier bag as inspiration. His signature label tacked onto each garment has become synonymous with the best of modern design.

All the clothes featured on this page are available at Liberty. The Independent is hosting a reader evening at the store on Wednesday 25 March, 6.30pm-8.30pm. The first 250 readers to apply for tickets are invited to be talked through the collections for men and women by 'The Independent' stylist, Sophia Neophitou, and the fashion editor, Tamsin Blanchard. Expert advice will help solve your new season shopping problems and there will be a 15 per cent discount available on fashion purchases bought on the night. Tickets are £5, including a free goody bag from NARS cosmetics, champagne and canapés. Send a cheque payable to Liberty Plc to Jo Childs, Liberty Press Office, Regent Street, London W1R 6AH.



Above: Black and white Prince of Wales check and pinstripe dress, £255 by Alexander McQueen, available from Liberty, Regent Street, London W1, Browns, 23-27 South Molton Street, London W1, Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge, London SW1, Harrods, Knightsbridge, London SW3, Joseph, 77 Fulham Road, London SW3. Far left: Red leather jacket with slash back, £750, by Tristan Webber, from Liberty, Koh Samui, 65 Monmouth Street, London WC2.



Above left: Black & silver lace-up dress, £1,800, by Antonio Berardi, from Liberty, A La Mode, 36 Hans Crescent, London SW3. Above right: Beige skirt, £75, sky blue t-shirt, £35, grey jacket, £165, all by YMC, from Liberty, Duffer of St George, 29 Shorts Gardens, London WC2, Browns Focus, South Molton Street, London W1, navy socks, £4.99, by Hua, from department stores nationwide; loafers, £49.99, by Office, Neal Street, London WC1. Stylist, Sophia Neophitou Hair and Makeup, Fiona Moore for Jo Hansford, Model, Camilla at Storm



## Ironing emerges as next big thing

Milan Fashion Week, and shopping frenzy is in the air. British designers are known for their challenging ideas, but in Milan all of that goes right out of the window. Ideas are replaced by shopping lists, as the fashion press concentrate on how they can update their wardrobes.

At Prada, however, Miuccia came over all intellectual with her collection for autumn/winter '98, entitled "Cut-Out". "Emotion of THE NEW DRESS is the physical pleasure of wearing THE CHANGE," read the show notes.

"IRONING AS DECORATION," they declared. Editors looked at each other in bafflement. Perhaps we had missed something in the translation, as the entire British press sat in our back-row seats, Fashion Siberia.

As the show began, we realised that staying at home doing the ironing is about to become the hip thing. Shift dresses are meticulously folded up into a tiny square and pressed until the crease marks are razor sharp.

At last, status dressing that doesn't have to cost a penny. You can do it yourself with a touch of steam. But the

## MILAN DIARY



Missoni: A/W 1998 Photograph: Chris Moore

clothes seemed strangely irrelevant as close-ups of the shoes were projected onto screens at each side of the catwalk. They came in the form of two-tone red and white patent leather mules, white patent 1960s pin-up boots, shiny T-bar high-heeled mules and chisel toe heels became top of every fashion victim's shopping list for autumn.

If Prada is about shoes, the Italian knitwear family Missoni is most definitely about clothes. Real, wearable clothes. The ageing founders of the company, Tai and Rosita Missoni, have handed over the design reins to their daughter, Angela, and made the label credible after 25 years in business by employing Mario Testino – otherwise known as Super Mario – to soup up the advertising.

The clothes were both up-to-the-minute and classically wearable. There were the signature striped tops, tweedy knitted coats, and Lurex basket-weave dresses, all in rich oil-slick colours. The pleated skirt that dominated the shows in London and Milan so far was made to flatter in the form of a knife-pleated knitted wrap-around skirt that would look fabulous whatever the size of your hips. And that, surely, is worth a place on anybody's shopping list.

Tamsin Blanchard

## OUT OF THE CLOSET

This week Holly Davies talks to Suzanne Clements of design duo Clements Ribeiro to discover what's lurking in the back of her wardrobe

"At the moment I have no wardrobe secrets. We are just about to move house and I'm seven months' pregnant."

I've been living in four blas cut dresses that I made up out of scraps in the studio. My cashmere cardigans still fit me just about, I've got bags of them – I'm a bit of card queen. After every collection I get them made for me in every colourway.

The only thing I can still wear from my original wardrobe is my red Comme des Garçons dress – I love it, it's virtually the only coloured piece I wear now. I've discovered that black

really is a stunning colour, so now most of my clothes are black and long.

The collection we've just finished for Autumn-Winter ended up with quite a few long black things in it, which is very "un-us". I generally find the tighter the clothes the better – I can't bear the thought of looking like a tent. Everything has to be really practical too, which means all my fab Manolo Blahnik shoes are out. Our manufacturer is making me some cashmere baby clothes that I'm really excited about – we're going to have little marching outfits. It sounds really naff, but I can't wait."



Ben Elmes

## Hiccups, yes, but Harriet's lone parent deal works

IT WAS the work ethic writ large: the declaration on the form said: "I declare that I will be better off in work." This was to become our mantra - that we single parents living on income support who had joined Harriet Harman's project to get us off benefit and into work would reap the rewards.

After several years in Paris I was unprepared for this new version of Britain. I returned here with my three-year-old daughter, only to be shocked at the scarcity of childcare and the lack of opportunities. In France lone parents who choose to stay at home receive much higher benefits than in Britain. Childcare is subsidised: you pay 10 per cent of net income.

Like many women with children, the most attractive solution was part-time work, but finding something suitable is difficult. So I was interested in trying one of the Government's New Deal courses, New Labour's answer to lone-parent poverty.

Gingerbread, the lone parent charity, in partnership with Training for Life, (which usually provides training for young people) runs a six-week course, during school hours. Job search workshops are provided, with help in deciding career direction and CV writing. It also offers the all important help with the cost of childcare.

Most of the employees are unemployed "volunteers" working for either £10 extra a week on their benefits or, in two cases, working for the cost of childcare. Every day of the fast-track week started at least an hour and a half late and, three weeks into the course, there have been no workshops to date.

For people with pre-school children there is either an in-house crèche or £35 weekly towards childcare but I pay £70 a week for my daughter's nursery.

We were also told we would be introduced to "Family Friendly" employers. When Barclays Bank gave a recruitment talk offering part-time positions as cashiers, we were told the pay was £8,000 gross but sick pay and carers' leave (for when a dependant is ill) had to be taken out of the 10 days' annual leave. Full-time workers are entitled to four weeks.

The course promised a "personal action plan and targeted CV" but unlike a job club, it does not provide individual help, telephones, free postage or fax facilities. Yet the cost of finding work is one of the biggest barriers for lone parents.

The group has discussed whether to be honest in interviews about having children. In my experience employers were almost exclusively interested in childcare arrangements rather than my ability to do the job. One of our advisers, neatly side-stepped the issue: "Try not to bring up the subject, because you won't get the job if you do. If employers have the choice between a person with no dependants and a single mother, you know who they will pick."

I have enjoyed the camaraderie of the course and the pseudo back-to-work atmosphere. It has given me confidence to send off for jobs and re-establish old work contacts.

It has also been interesting also to watch how the people on the course have subtly changed even in three weeks. Gone is the softly scruffy look of motherhood. The women have started wearing jackets, shirts and make-up - an office image.

Kerstin Jones

# A head start in life?



Nothing but the best: Children at the Park Nursery School, Battersea. Their parents place a high priority on formal teaching, and competition is fierce

Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

## Children as young as two are having to prove their ability in the scramble for prestige school places. Celia Dodd reports

"MY GOD, is Isobel reading already? James doesn't even know his alphabet. I'm wondering whether I should take him out of his nursery because they don't seem to be pushing him enough. And if he falls behind now he'll never get in to Oxford."

James is three. His mother's anxieties, overheard outside a London nursery school, are easy to laugh at, but if they're honest, most parents admit that these days the panic about education starts earlier and earlier. Many of the parents whose children have just heard they've won coveted places to private and public schools and the remaining state grammars believe that the achievement can be put down to not only getting them into the best primary schools, but the best nurseries as well.

The canniest families move to the catchment area of a highly desirable state primary (often harder to enter than the

most academic prep schools) and put their child's name down at birth. The less organised face the uncomfortable prospect of their child being tested for a place at a selective prep school at the age of three or four. Many, who may not have made up their minds about state versus private, want to give their child a head-start just in case.

The result is that it is now common for toddlers who are barely out of nappies to take up places at private nursery schools within weeks of their second birthday, while in the state sector three-plus is still considered the desirable norm.

Parents are also demanding a more formal approach to learning and expect to see results which will stand their child in good stead for the next stage - whether it's an entrance exam or the baseline assessments which all children now face on entry to state primary school. Increasingly nursery school - once seen as a crucial stage of education in its own right, is viewed as preparation for "real" school.

And what about preparation for nursery? The headmistress of a selective nursery class in north London with four applicants for every place says she expects successful candidates (aged two) to have been to a playgroup, to know how to socialise. No wonder parents are queuing up to get their babies into Tumbletoys.

At The Park Nursery School in Battersea, south-west London, staff are under pressure from parents to deliver a more formal curriculum. The vast majority of the Park's pupils - all but two this year - go on to selective private schools nearby or just across the river in Chelsea. Hot favourite is Thomas's Prep - notoriously difficult to penetrate, with four three-year-olds battling for every place.

The talk among those waiting to collect their children rarely strays far from which child has got a place at which school. One mother says, "There is a lot of hysteria about getting in. It's all people talk about at dinner parties and teas. People are obsessed. There's a lot of stress around."

Last term, anxious parents met the teachers and tried to persuade them to concentrate more on the three Rs. Christine Bowman, whose younger daughter started at the Park shortly after her second birthday, says: "The assessments have had a big knock-on effect. A lot of us want to make sure our children are prepared for the interviews and that they really do know their letters and numbers."

"I used to walk up to school thinking, 'my daughter's bumpy, she's having a fun time, that's the whole point of nursery'. But now I want this to be a teaching place, to make sure the girls are tutored to gain en-

trance to a prep school. But it's terribly early to start."

Christine speaks from experience: last year her elder daughter failed to get into Thomas's when she was three. She says ruefully: "I had been quite relaxed until I realised that all the other children had interviews at several other schools, whereas Lucy was only trying for Thomas's. I started thinking, my child's not going to get in anywhere. I was probably more stressed out than I've ever been. It was terrible."

At Thomas's they take your child away in a group of other children for an hour, and you don't what's going on. You're supposed to make polite conversation with the others but all the time you're thinking 'I hope she's not going to pretend she can't talk'. Then all you get is a letter saying she's 'not suitable'."

Schools like Thomas's say they are more interested in whether the child will fit into the school and can socialise; they don't want a child who climbs the wall and scribbles. Jill Kelham, vice-principal, says: "We're not looking for a three-year old who can already show evidence of reading and writing ability - although if a child spontaneously points out letters or numbers it's noted. We're looking at what their concentration is, what their level of vocabulary is, we're looking for the spark of curiosity, interest

level, sociability - which I suppose adds up to teachability."

Other nursery schools are happier to adopt a more formal approach to learning: pupils practice correct letter formation, fill in worksheets, learn phonics and do homework. Some take the children for whole, rather than the more usual half-days; some have uniforms; the most desirable even select their pupils through tests at two.

Yet many experts on children's early development believe that such a formal approach is not merely counterproductive but even harmful in the long term. Earlier this year a study for Channel 4's *Dispatches* concluded that children in countries where formal school starts up to three years later than in Britain have much better results in literacy and numeracy. The report also suggests that boys in particular may suffer from an early start in reading. In the more educationally successful countries, such as Switzerland and Hungary, education before the age of six or even seven focuses on speaking, concentrating and listening - getting children ready to learn - rather than reading and writing.

Try telling that to a parent whose three-year-old has her Start-Rites firmly on the first rung of an increasingly competitive educational ladder, who loves tracing letters and is racing through the reading scheme

## THE INDEPENDENT

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## Mulberry's luxury goes out of fashion

One of the best-known names in leather goods and designer clothes is in trouble. Nigel Cope finds out why



Roger Saul: Started international business with £500

ITS NAME is well-known to lovers of expensive leather luggage and designer clothing - and a quintessentially English look that sells so well from Kensington to Kyoto. But now it is in trouble. Mulberry, the luxury goods group based in Somerset, revealed yesterday that its profits have been devastated by the strong pound, which has affected tourist spending in Britain and hit exports.

Mulberry is now in an extremely precarious financial position. The firm is closing a factory in Somerset, cutting 28 jobs and outsourcing more manufacturing to continental Europe. After issuing its third profits warning in less than 10 weeks it now expects to make a loss of £750,000 this year while its debts stand at £7m. The company's shares have slumped to an all-time low on

the stock market and experts say the company may not have an independent future.

What has happened to Mulberry is symptomatic of a wider malaise among luxury goods groups, according to Clive Vaughan, of the retail consultancy Verdict Research. "It is the same story with Harrods, Asprey and Theo Fennell (the upmarket jewellers). They had a good ride off the back of a weak pound. Now it has turned against them," he says.

The economic turmoil in the Far East, where Burberry raincoats and Mulberry handbags have been so popular, has only served to compound the difficulties. There have been profits warnings from Gucci and poor results from Burberry. Even the likes of Louis Vuitton and Bulgari have been finding the going tough.

Mulberry's decline is a bitter blow for its entrepreneurial founder, Roger Saul. Now 47, Mr Saul started Mulberry in 1971 with the £500 given to him as a 21st birthday present by his parents. He made leather chokers on his kitchen table and sold them to Biba, the trendy London boutique. Now Mulberry sells its

clothing, accessories and "home" collections in 32 countries around the world. The prices are high with a small leather document case retailing at £119, while a leather holdall will set you back £199. Then there are the organisers, wristwatches, belts and sunglasses.

It has enabled Mr Saul to

live what might be described as a "Mulberry life". He is married to Monty, a former Christian Dior model and lives in a converted Somerset farmhouse crammed full of luxuriously upholstered sofas and designer knick-knacks. He gets colouring ideas from the flowers in his walled garden. And he adds a dash of derring-do to his English countryside lifestyle by occasionally racing his 1932 Alfa Romeo 8C in the Mille Miglia, the Italian classic car race.

Mr Saul's problem now is that Mulberry is just too small to match the marketing muscle of Louis Vuitton or Gucci. It cannot cut prices for fear of damaging the "elite" status of the brand. It can only cut costs and hang on.

Retail experts say Mulberry may fall victim to a takeover, either from a rival luxury brand or a wealthy individual seeking a trophy asset. Dickson Poon, the Hong Kong-based entrepreneur who owns half of Harvey Nichols, may be interested. It is now available at a knock-down price of £8m.



# THE INDEPENDENT

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## Even Gates must play by the rules

LATER THIS year Bill Gates's Microsoft will unveil Windows 98, the latest, fastest and (it hopes) most "user-friendly" interface between computer users and their machines. However exaggerated some of the claims made for the role computers play in our economy and society, there is no doubt this launch will once again be a great event and will change the way millions of people around the world function on a daily basis. But if Microsoft sticks with its current plans, it will be selling a product which, American courts argue, constitutes a restraint on competition. And that is something even Bill Gates, hero of cyberspace, should not be allowed to do.

The gist of a judgment last December by a federal judge was that the inclusion in the product of Microsoft's own "browser" for the Internet is seriously harming the capacity of other software companies to compete. To defend his company and its strategy Mr Gates appeared yesterday before the US Senate's Judiciary Committee. This committee is not the most distinguished operation, and not just because it is Republican-dominated. But it is still a legitimate forum in which to hold Microsoft to account, and perhaps it may also act as a proxy for all those non-American computer-users who will be affected by decisions made in the US.

Bill Gates excites admiration across the globe. He is, in the same way as Richard Branson here, one of capitalism's most acceptable faces. Many young people swim happily in information technology culture, and to them Bill Gates has become a cult figure. That he appears to be liberal-minded and progressive in instinct helps endear him more. Yet no conclusive evidence has been produced which says that the market for software, for graphical interfaces or for accessing the Web has floated free of those norms which decree, as they always have, that the consumer's best friend is the fullest competition between keen rivals. Has the historical rule which says that sooner or later even the most benign monopolists start to abuse their power really been suspended? Would Microsoft cease to invest and innovate if computer buyers could choose other operating systems? Of course not. The question thus has to be whether Microsoft's ability to "bundle" a browser with Windows does inhibit competition.

The expert evidence is that it does. The expert evidence also suggests that it would not be so difficult, nor so onerous on Microsoft, if computer users were able to buy Windows and Microsoft's Net products only as separate entities. There is no reason why such an ordinance need prevent product development or technological advance. Bill Gates is an international treasure, but that has not stopped him sulking and throwing fits of pique. Ultimately, however much of a visionary he may be, he is wedded to no interest other than his own. His magnificent achievement in building up Microsoft must not now become an excuse for relieving him of the responsibility of playing by market rules.

## Tycoon who taints news



A NEWSPAPER'S lifeblood is its credibility. We may miss a story or we may get only half the story, but we are of value to you only to the extent you are prepared to credit our attempt to get things right. If, say, our foreign correspondents write about conversations with politicians or peasants, business leaders or dissidents, they will supply their own interpretation and analysis based on their own experience. There is no question of varnishing, filtration, second-guessing or consultation with some boss about his commercial interests: what you see is what you get.

As the full extent of Rupert Murdoch's engagement with the Chinese regime becomes clear, so does his proficiency with his newspapers' capacity to inspire that trust. His editors take his shilling and dance to his tune, wiggling their hips to entertain foreign potentates sitting on their divans. His newspaper, *The Times*, it is true, always enjoyed a reputation greater than its history warranted: this was the newspaper, after all, which had for decades been in the pocket of Tory politicians. During the First World War it proved to be a compliant tool for profiteering magnates. On the eve of the Second it became a willing accomplice of dictators. Against that backdrop its surrender to Murdoch signifies only because of the hypocrisy involved in pretending (as *The Times* still does, at great length, especially on the subject of Europe) to speak for the British nation while bending its reportage, let alone its editorialising, to the whims and profit margins of its owner.

It seems that once in the Far East Murdoch's men are transformed; they look like travelling salesmen. But on their return – we are supposed to believe – they revert, once again, to speaking freely. Mr Murdoch has just about ripped away whatever tattered remnants were left of his newspapers' pretensions to be concerned with truth. Let's say it out loud. What reader of any Murdoch title can really trust any story or commentary or analysis that touches the interests of Rupert Murdoch? And let's not forget how extensive they are. This could mean that that nothing in, say, *The Times* to do with sports, the media, North American politics, South-east Asia, China or Australian economics and politics seems free of taint.

*The Sun's* veracity has been a jest for years. Many credulous people still hoped where they did not believe that somehow *The Times*, a grand old institution, would keep its hands clean. We now must have the gravest doubts. Rupert Murdoch is an agent of moral debilitation. Across the globe, he seems to be able to turn people capable of doing an honest job into time-servers and courtiers. None of us can ever read any of the words they write without a shudder of contempt.



Spring rain in London: a view of Westminster from the Thames Embankment

Photograph: Brian Harris

A 9x12 print of this photograph can be ordered on 0171-293 2534

### Autism and MMR jab

IT WILL cost more, in the long run, to pay for care of our autistic children for life, than to give the measles, mumps and rubella vaccination as separate injections, rather than the current combined one, as suggested by Dr Andrew Wakefield ("Doctors link autism to MMR vaccination", 27 February).

I quite agree that measles is a killer and one wishes to see a return of this disease but, for one, would not have given my son the combined MMR vaccine if I had been aware that there was any chance of him becoming autistic.

My "normal" developing, very easy-going, responsive child is now shut away in his own world, needing 24-hour attention and assistance. Our family life is totally split; rarely do we venture out, all four of us together, as Michael's needs have to be considered to prevent outbursts of anger and frustration. We're not able to do things other families take for granted: playing board-games, going to the cinema, or to the pantomime at Christmas. Michael couldn't cope with these, becoming agitated and confused by the noise and crowds.

We should fund further immediate research and stop giving the combined MMR vaccines until it can be proved "beyond reasonable doubt" that there is no link between the MMR vaccine and autism. I applaud Dr Wakefield and all the research team for taking the first step, and making people aware of this condition.

KAREN GOODALL  
Cambridge

### End of farming?

THANK YOU for your report from the bus on its way from Leek to the countryside protest (2 March). It made me reflect how little attention has been paid to the question of what will happen to land that is going to be lost to active farming over the next five to ten years as a result of influences quite separate from any anti-hunting legislation.

An increasingly global food market, the effects of BSE and the like-

ly reduction or removal of hill-farming subsidies will put many farmers out of business. After the markets for rural retreats, golf courses, paintballing, off-roading and holiday villages have been satisfied, what happens to the rest of the land? Who will spread the muck (where will it come from?), cut the hay and maintain hedges, ditches, drains, walls and woods?

Market forces are already determining what happens to rural transport, shops, schools and pubs, and these impoverishing influences will continue largely outside the influence of government. But will government, national parks authorities, the National Trust and others start to plan how to manage the piecemeal demise of large numbers of small upland farms? Are they the right bodies to do this?

Threats to hunting and field sports clearly exist, but are, I suggest, less important than those to the livelihoods of upland farmers and to their land, the results of which we are likely to witness in the early years of the next millennium.

PATRICK NAISIE  
Whiston, Staffordshire

IS IT significant that with farmers facing a crisis on a par with that faced by the miners in the early 1990s, with lowering or even loss of their livelihoods, Lord Mancroft (letter, 2 March) feels that it is appropriate that the anger and bitterness should be focused on the threat to hunting?

I am a "townie" through and through, and probably do find it difficult to understand some of the problems affecting the countryside. However, I would have thought that my genuine sympathy and concern for their plight must be worth more than the wealthy, smug and self-satisfied country gentry who take advantage of the misfortunes of farmers to promote their own desire to continue with hunting.

Farmers would be better off looking to garner support from all sectors of society (yes even "townies") and disassociating themselves from anachronistic interest groups with whom they have little in common.

TONY WHITEHEAD  
Halifax, West Yorkshire

THERE IS an obvious alternative to the practices of the bloodsports fraternity – go in pursuit of vegetarian alternatives. We already have the pioneering Quorn Hunt, which has shown the way forward. Can we now hope to see the much kinder activities of soya baiting and tofu coursing?

J E LAMPER  
Wareham, Dorset

### BBC in Parliament

TO SUGGEST (leading article, 28 February) that Radio 4's controller, James Boyle, wants to "shout off" *Yesterday in Parliament* because it is "boring" is wrong. James Boyle has already made clear that it is his intention to give more choice to Radio 4 listeners. This can be achieved by using long wave – the frequency which is universally available to almost every home in the United Kingdom.

You are right to stress that covering Parliament is part of the BBC's public service remit. We welcome that. But the real public service challenge is to engage new audiences in what is going on in Parliament. That is why we have spent many months talking to viewers and listeners about how best we can do it.

The result is an ambitious set of proposals which will strengthen our public service remit in relation to Parliament – with more air time and some fresh formats. The highlights include a new parliamentary programme on BBC 2 and a new service on the Internet, to be launched in the spring, which will give access

to debates in audio, text and eventually video too. Taken together, this breadth of services, on television, on radio and online, represents an unrivalled commitment to reporting the democratic process.

TONY HALL  
Chief Executive  
BBC News  
London W12

### Speaking for the IRA

FOR MANY years I have admired the verbal dexterity of Gerry Adams and his colleagues – so much cleverer than the entrenched bloody-mindedness of most of the Unionists. But the latest example leaves us with a problem.

If one of the principal objectives of the peace talks is to bring the cycle of violence to an end, and if Sinn Féin now say that they should not be confused with the IRA, how can there be any reliable prospect of the IRA ceasing violence even if the talks succeed?

I suppose the same observation arises across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. So the question is: whatever the representative politicians may say or agree, how can they deliver peace unless they declare that they speak for the men of violence? Isn't such a declaration rather an important point to have missed?

A S R WALKER  
Oaksey, Wiltshire

### Dome thoughts

IT IS genuinely refreshing to know that the centrepiece of the dome which that nice Mr Mandelson is preparing for us is to be the largest queer (or at least androgynous) one-parent family in history. It's almost enough to cure one of domophobia.

The Rev ALEC McGUIRE  
Leeds

### Modern Latin

ROGER Wordsworth (Letters, 3 March) is mightily optimistic in suggesting that Latin should become the language of the European Union. With its ablative absolutes, subjunctives, declensions, conjugations, pluperfects and semi-deponent verbs, it is unlikely to be a hit with our allegedly dumbed-down two-minute-attention-span culture.

But if we can invent a Euro-currency, why not a Euro-language: a modernised, grammar-pruned, phonetic, gender-free Latin – learning shrewdly from the well-intentioned failures of Esperanto – which would be as syntactically easy as English, as phonetic as Spanish, and close to the linguistic origins of most of the EU territory? Taught in schools throughout the Union as the second language of the 21st century, compared with French and German it would be a doddle.

IAN FLINTOFF  
London SW6

### Princess's play

YOU WERE mistaken in stating in your profile of Princess Margaret (25 February) that she directed *The Frog* – and that it sank without trace.

Alan Jefferson directed the play, which was presented by Judy Montgomery, Billy Wallace and Anthony Berry at the Scala Theatre, Charlotte Street, London W1, on 1, 2 and 3 June, 1954, in aid of the Invalid Children's Aid Association.

Princess Margaret gave wholehearted support to the venture and attended many rehearsals. The presenters and society cast gave their time freely over many weeks to ensure the success of the production and the fund-raising for the ICAA. I was a member of the technical staff.

The Duke of Devonshire, Lord Porchester, the Marchioness of Dufferine and Ays and Viscount and Viscountess Norwich were but a few of Princess Margaret's friends who participated.

ISHBEL BLAND  
Twickenham, Middlesex

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MILES KINGTON

WEEK BY WEEK, *The Independent* brings you the best bargains in the media market place.

Last week we guaranteed to have someone carrying the placard of your choice on the Countryside March! (The winner was THE AMERICAN GUN LOBBY SUPPORTS PETER MANDERSON'S DOMES)

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The fascination of Melvyn Bragg with science is well known – you have almost certainly bought his latest book *On Giants' Shoulders*, about great scientists of the past – but not so well known is his interest in technology, culminating in this, his very first book about DIY. In it he poses the great questions of our time, such as "Did God intend round pins or square pins?", "Did God intend screw-in hanks or bayonet fittings?", "What do we actually mean when we say God?" and "Is a woman's place in the Homebase?"

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July 20 1998



## EMI non-execs blocked Fifield from top job

By Michael Harrison and Nigel Cope

A REARGUARD action by EMI's non-executive directors prevented Jim Fifield, the 47-year-old head of its music division, from succeeding Sir Colin Southgate as chief executive, it emerged yesterday.

Mr Fifield is understood to have been the favoured candidate among executive directors to take over the top job when Sir Colin moves into the role of non-executive chairman. But the powerful group of independent directors on the EMI board blocked the move.

It has also been confirmed that Sir Colin's decision to stay on as executive chairman is a short-term measure and that a successor as chief executive is expected to be named by June or July. The group is looking internally and externally for a new chief executive.

The group of non-executives who blocked Mr Fifield's promotion consists of Sir Peter Walters, non-executive chairman of SmithKline Beecham; Eric Nicoli, chief executive of United Biscuits; Sir Graham Day, former chairman of Rover; British Aerospace and PowerGen; Hugh Jenkins, formerly of the Prudential; and Dr Harald Einsmann, an executive director of Proctor and Gamble.

Although it had been sug-

gested that the EMI board balked at the salary being demanded by Mr Fifield, senior internal sources rejected this.

"It wasn't so personal as that. The board decided it wanted someone with a wider scope and a broader menu of skills who had financial abilities required but also the strategic vision to see where the group has come from, where it is going and the technologies that will drive it," one insider said.

Suggestions that Mr Fifield's prospects of seizing the top job had been undermined by his closeness to Ken Berry, the president of EMI Recorded Music, were also discounted.

The Bel Air-based Mr Berry and his wife, Nancy, have been subject to unfavourable coverage of their lifestyles and the power that the duo now wield within the EMI empire.

But one senior source dismissed reports that Sir Colin and the board were unhappy with Mr Berry as "horseshit". He added: "The board and Sir Colin believe Berry is doing what he is paid for and doing it well."

Stories about his wife's rock'n'roll lifestyle, including late-night parties at fashionable Los Angeles and New York clubs, and Mrs Berry's penchant for attending meetings barefooted and in short skirts, were dismissed as "a nasty little campaign".

City analysts have become concerned about what they perceive to be a power vacuum beneath Sir Colin Southgate at EMI. With Mr Fifield set to leave when his contract runs out next year and Ken Berry ruled out for the top job, there are no other credible internal candidates for the position of chief executive. An external search will take longer, leaving Sir Colin to fulfil his dual roles as chairman of EMI and head of the Royal Opera House.

EMI shares have performed dismally since it was demerged from the Thorn rental business in summer 1996. The shares have lost more than 25 per cent of their value since then. However, the stock bounced 22p to 540p yesterday as bid rumours resurfaced. Analysts say a predator could take advantage of EMI's management malaise and use it as an opportunity to strike. Seagram, Disney and Bertelsmann, the German music group, have all been mentioned as possible bidders.

EMI is set to become a more focused music group following its Waterstone's deal with WH Smith last week. Its HMV music and Dillons books businesses will be grouped into a separate company with Waterstone's. The new company, HMV Media, will be treated as an associate in EMI's accounts and floated within two years.



Under attack: Jon Foulds, chairman, and chief executive Mike Blackburn announcing Halifax's first results since going public, and their plans. Photograph: John Voos

## Halifax £1bn share buyback brings strategy under fire

By Andrew Verity

HALIFAX, the former building society, was attacked yesterday for having a "muddled" corporate strategy after it confirmed that it would spend £1bn on a share buyback but left the City confused about its acquisition plans.

Announcing its first results since becoming a public company last year, the bank pledged to spend one-quarter of its £4bn surplus on buying back shares over the next 12 months.

The move will disappoint its four million policyholders who have hung on to windfall shares in the hope of a special dividend. It was widely hoped the new bank would use an upfront dividend payment to give shareholders a second windfall of more than £100 each.

Jon Foulds, chairman of Halifax, said: "We did look at all options and concluded that the share buy-back program was the right one." It added that it would be "in and out of the market" for its own shares over the next year, if and when the price was right to enhance value for remaining shareholders.

Mr Foulds said Halifax was still looking to make an acquisition but said it could not see value in a UK purchase. But he also held out the prospect of an expansion into Europe.

"Taking a long-term view, it probably will be right for the Halifax at some stage to move into Europe but it has got to be on a worthwhile scale. If the right opportunity came up

in the short term then we would certainly be interested. But it may not. This is a very long game of chess."

The buyback was announced as Halifax revealed that its share of the mortgage market, measured as net lending, had shrunk from 11 per cent in 1996 to just 6 per cent last year. Meanwhile, savers withdrew £615m from deposit accounts - against an inflow of £2,318m the year before.

Mike Blackburn, chief executive, said that both figures had been affected by the conversion last summer. Many mortgage holders had redeemed their loans after waiting months or even years to pick up windfall shares.

However, he admitted that market conditions were tough because rival lenders were slashing their margins. The society would spend 20 per cent more this year on special deals for first-time buyers.

City analysts reacted with disappointment to the buyback plan and bemoaned the apparent lack of a clear corporate strategy.

Geoff Miller, an analyst at Wise Spoke, the private client stockbroker, said: "The whole strategic message was garbled and the message coming through is not a positive one. The company really needs to do something to demonstrate that they are able to benefit from the fact that a third of the UK population has had an account. The Halifax has a strategy, but it has yet to put any of it into practice."

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## £4.45bn bid tips see-saw battle for Energy Group to Texas Utilities

By Michael Harrison

THE extraordinary battle for control of Energy Group, owner of Eastern Electricity, saw-sawed back in favour of Texas Utilities yesterday after it raised its offer to £4.45bn and snapped up a 14 per cent stake in the company.

The \$40p-a-share offer trumped the \$20p bid announced on Monday evening by its US rival, PacifiCorp. Last night the Oregon-based Pac-

ifiCorp was deciding whether to come back with yet another increased offer.

Texas, which threw its bat into the ring with an opening bid of 810p at the start of the week, said that it had acquired 72.56 million Energy Group shares at the new bid price of 840p representing 13.9 per cent of the company.

PacifiCorp, which began the auction last June for Energy Group with a bid worth 695p, has built up a 10.5 per cent

stake. Under Takeover Panel rules, the two groups cannot raise their stakes above 15 per cent.

Although Texas has tabled the highest price, it does not have regulatory clearance for its bid, unlike PacifiCorp which was cleared by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in December.

An MMC referral of the Texas bid is thought unlikely. But it remains an outside possibility, particularly if the Pres-

ident of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett, decides that the funding of the bid could put undue strain on its finances and threaten Eastern's ability to fund its operations.

Eastern is the biggest regional electricity company in Britain with three million customers. It is also the fourth largest electricity generator and one of the biggest independent players in the liberalised gas market.

Erle Nye, the Texas chair-

man, is due to see the Office of Fair Trading and Department of Trade and Industry officials this week to argue his case for avoiding a referral. Earlier this week Texas said it believed it would get regulatory approvals on both sides of the Atlantic within the two month bid timetable.

Texas has arranged a \$10.3bn (£6.24bn) debt facility to fund the bid which, if successful, would initially create a group with debts of \$18bn.

Disposals and the issue of new equity would reduce this to \$14bn, giving it a conventional debt-equity gearing of 155 per cent.

PacifiCorp's initial £3.7bn bid last June was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in August on the grounds that the regulatory system might not have been sufficient to police the merged company adequately. The Office of Fair Trading and the electricity regulator Professor

Stephens Littlechild both came down against a referral.

The bid was subsequently cleared by the MMC in December without any conditions in addition to those already recommended by the OFT to ring-fence Eastern.

One Whitehall source said: "If a case raises the same issues as an earlier one then in general you would be mad to go through the MMC all over again. But no two cases are ever identical."

## SmithKline executives go on charm offensive

By Andrew Yates

SMITHKLINE Beecham yesterday launched a befitting round of meetings with its institutional shareholders designed to ward off a hostile bid from Glaxo Wellcome after merger talks between the two drugs giants collapsed last week.

SmithKline is telling shareholders over the next few days that it has a strong future and can survive as an independent group. It is also stressing that its top executives are united in their opposition for a deal with Glaxo. Institutions have also been assured that the board is right behind Jan Leschly, the group's chief executive, over his decision to call off the merger talks after what he deemed to be a betrayal by Glaxo when it tried to change the original terms of the deal.

Industry sources suggest SmithKline is confident it can enlist enough support from fund managers to deter a takeover by Glaxo. However, a number of shareholders remain disgruntled that they have lost out on more than £1.5bn of value that would have been created by a merger and speculation in the City is mounting that Glaxo will launch a hostile bid within the next few days.

Mr Leschly and his deputy, Jean-Pierre Garnier, are being accompanied by the non-executive chairman, Sir Peter Walters, no SmithKline's charm offensive, which will be used to try to restore the group's battered reputation after it called off two mergers within a month.

## National Power shares feel the chill of electricity price cuts

By Michael Harrison

SHARES in the electricity generators fell sharply yesterday after National Power warned that new lower-priced contracts signed with the regional supply companies would wipe £140m off its profits in the coming financial year.

The company said that it would be passing through £30m of cost savings, of which £100m resulted from lower coal prices, worth a total of £12 off domestic bills and £65 off the annual charge for a small business.

The reduction in bills has already been factored into the new two-year supply price controls which come into effect in April and will save the average household £24. Generation costs account for 56 per cent of domestic electricity bills.

National Power said that the price reductions stemmed from increased competition in the generating market and harder

gains struck by the regional electricity companies (Recs) as they prepared for the opening up of the domestic market.

Shares in the group fell 31p to 587p, while PowerGen shares ended the day 29p lower at 803p.

National Power said that it had secured contracts covering all its expected generating output next year. Contracts with the ReCs for domestic supplies account for about 70 per cent of its output and these have been signed up at a price of about 3p a unit.

The impact of the price cuts will be to lower National Power's profits from about £740m in the current year to £610m in 1998-99. A spokesman said the prices it had obtained were the best available.

The five-year "back to back" coal contracts between the generators and the regional electricity companies end this April. Under the contracts, National

Power, PowerGen and Eastern have been able to pass on the costs of having to buy higher-priced British coal to the domestic market. In the current year, the average price paid by the generators is 148p a gigajoule. Next year it will fall to under 120p.

All three generators are taking much less coal next year from RJB Mining, Britain's biggest coal producer, prompting fears that as many as eight pits will have to close with the loss of 5,000 jobs. National Power has contracted to buy 8 million tons against the 10 million tons it bought in 1997-98. PowerGen has only contracted to buy 3 million tons.

A deal was brokered before last Christmas by the Paymaster General, Geoffrey Robinson, giving the threatened pits a three-month lifeline when contracts run out in April. But there is no sign yet of a solution that will safeguard the pits in the longer term.



Stephen Littlechild: Bigger penalties for companies

Meanwhile, the industry regulator, Professor Stephen Littlechild, announced higher penalties for supply companies that perform poorly, including an increased compensation payment of £50 for customers who have their electricity cut off for more than 24 hours.

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## PIA gives record £525,000 mis-selling fine to Britannic

By Andrew Verity

BRITANNIC Assurance was yesterday given a withering public reprimand and a record fine of £525,000 over failures in compensating investors who lost thousands of pounds each because of pension mis-selling. The Personal Investment Authority also billed it for legal costs of £125,000 after it battled for a year to persuade the insurer to rectify fundamental failings in its efforts to compensate victims of mis-selling.

Britannic, a home-service insurer which collects premiums door-to-door, failed even to send vital questionnaires to possible mis-selling victims on time. They were supposed to have been sent, returned and dealt with by 31 December 1996. Despite knowing of the regulator's concern, Britannic failed properly to chase policyholders for replies. Its recommendations were "incomplete and ad hoc", the regulator said.

By the time the PIA visited the company in January 1997, two years after it was asked to look at the scandal, Britannic had not identified which policyholders needed urgent attention. The PIA said its fundamental failures were affected by weak planning. It had also dedicated inadequate resources to the review of pensions mis-selling.

Britannic "failed to take all reasonable steps to carry out its review of past pension transfer and opt-out business" along the lines demanded by regulators. The company said it was apologetic to policyholders; it would compensate 14,500 investors with urgent cases by the end of June at the latest.

Brian Shaw, Britannic's chief executive, said: "Wherever it is appropriate we do apologise. In dealing with customers we are indeed apologetic for what has happened. We recognise that the whole credibility of our business is to provide policy-

holders with the highest standards of service. We do acknowledge that in the period prior to January 1997 we did not have everything in place and we did not carry out the review in accordance with the PIA's standards." Asked why there were inadequacies in the level of resources devoted to the mis-selling review, Mr Shaw said: "We have always held this as a high priority. The extent to which we can actually allocate resources depends on the rate of progress being made."

In mitigation, the PIA admitted Britannic had believed it would be appropriate to focus on cases where it was most likely redress would be due.

But this was not what the PIA had demanded. The fine is a joint record, matched only by that given to London & Manchester, a rival home-service company, reinforcing the impression that door-to-door insurers were the worst culprits in the mis-selling scandal.

### STOCK MARKETS

Index	Close	Change	Change%	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield%
FTSE 100	5807.70	-12.90	-0.22	5946.90	4189.10	3.16
FTSE 250	5261.40	-26.80	-0.51	5264.60	4384.20	2.97
FTSE 350	2780.00	-2.40	-0.09	2792.20	2075.70	3.13
FTSE All Share	2705.97	-1.84	-0.07	2716.68	2056.07	3.11
FTSE SmallCap	2484.70	5.50	0.22	2479.30	2182.10	2.80
FTSE RealIndex	1360.30	1.50	0.11	1358.80	1225.20	3.19
FTSE AIM	1014.70	4.40	0.44	1135.50	968.90	0.99
Dow Jones	8534.01	-14.89	-0.17	8556.80	6356.70	1.53
Nikkei	17168.33	-38.11	-0.22	20310.79	14438.21	0.90
Hang Seng	11425.46	108.82	0.94	16620.31	7508.13	3.44
Dax	4757.14	20.40	0.43	4745.20	3192.33	1.60

### INTEREST RATES

Short sterling	UK 10 year gilt	US long bond
3 month 1 yr 5 yr	1 yr 5 yr 10 yr	1 yr 5 yr 10 yr
5.50 5.75 6.00	5.75 5.80 5.85	6.10 6.15 6.20
UK 3 month 1 yr 5 yr	US 3 month 1 yr 5 yr	JPY 3 month 1 yr 5 yr
5.50 5.75 6.00	5.75 5.80 5.85	5.75 5.80 5.85
Germany 3 month 1 yr 5 yr	France 3 month 1 yr 5 yr	Italy 3 month 1 yr 5 yr
5.50 5.75 6.00	5.75 5.80 5.85	5.75 5.80 5.85

### CURRENCIES

£/\$	DM/£	¥/£
1.6525 +0.0005	1.6175 -0.0005	161.75 -0.0005
1.6525 +0.0005	1.6175 -0.0005	161.75 -0.0005
1.6525 +0.0005	1.6175 -0.0005	161.75 -0.0005
1.6525 +0.0005	1.6175 -0.0005	161.75 -0.0005

### TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.3300	Japan (yen)	204.74
Austria (schillings)	20.36	Malta (lira)	0.6293
Belgium (francs)	59.90	Netherlands (guilders)	3.2666
Canada (\$)	2.2738	Norway (kroner)	12.18
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8462	Portugal (escudos)	205.10
Denmark (kroner)	11.11	Spain (pesetas)	244.46
France (francs)	8.8605	South Africa (rand)	7.7657
Germany (marks)	9.7720	Sweden (kroner)	12.83
Greece (drachmas)	2.9092	Switzerland (francs)	2.2543
Hong Kong (\$)	459.64	Turkey (lira)	362.277
Ireland (pounds)	1.6559	USA (\$)	1.6062
Italy (lira)	2.866		

Source: Thomas Cook  
Rates for indication purposes only

صكنا من الامل



## OUTLOOK

# Halifax tries gimmicks to claw back loyalty

THERE'S one figure that sticks out like a sore thumb from the generally flattering list of key statistics paraded by the Halifax yesterday with its first set of full year results as a plc. The former building society's share of net new mortgage lending slumped last year from 11 to just 6 per cent. Halifax's share of the total UK mortgage market, built up over the generations under mutual ownership, is somewhere in the high teens.

Plainly if this poor showing with net new mortgage lending continues for much longer, Halifax's overall position in the market will begin seriously to erode. What's happening here? Now that the Halifax is a bank, is the public beginning to treat it like one - by snubbing it in favour of what remains of the mutual tradition?

For the moment, investors seem to be unperturbed. A sharp fall in net new mortgage lending was common to all the newly converted building societies last year and it was caused largely by the process of conversion itself. Since mortgage borrowers were entitled to free shares in the converting building societies along with depositors, a backlog of mortgage redemptions built up as members sought to hold on long enough to benefit from the conversion.

That backlog broke like a dam the moment conversion took place, and by the Halifax's own calculation more than two years of normal redemptions and remortgages flow went through the books in the months immediately after the stock market float. If you look at gross new lending, ignoring redemptions, Halifax

says, then market shares are not much altered. But is this the whole story and where has the business gone to? The main beneficiaries certainly appear to have been the remaining mutuals. In part this is also explained by the conversion phenomenon. It obviously makes sense to take out a new mortgage with a mutual when there is some prospect of it one day converting. With the Halifax and other converted societies, the windfall has already been and gone. But it is also to do with the fact that the mutuals are on the whole now offering more competitive rates than the converted societies, both to savers and mortgage borrowers.

The Halifax is determined to claw back this loss of market share with a whole new raft of marketing gimmicks, cash back offers and the like. Other converted societies talk about getting the balance right between profitability and volume; they are prepared to cede volume if the result is enhanced profitability. But whichever way you cut it, the mutuals seem to be offering a better deal than the converts. Halifax also has to contend with new, low cost entrants to the market. The only constraint on the growth of the mutuals and the new entrants seems to be in their administrative capacity to deal with the influx of new business.

Even so, there is every possibility that the market share of the converted building societies will continue to erode sharply, albeit at not quite the same alarming pace as last year. It is not clear that a company that has matured in its core business

to this extent warrants the heady growth stock rating of 22 times earnings placed on the Halifax and its like. But then for the time being we are still in the longest running bull market of all time.

THERE HAS been much talk over the last week about how the "architecture of the global financial system" might be reformed to reduce the risks of violent mishap such as the sudden plunge of the Far East into economic crisis. Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve, started the ball rolling on Friday by saying "the architecture of the international financial system will need to be thoroughly reviewed and altered as necessary to fit the needs of the new global environment".

Not to be outdone, the US Treasury Secretary, Robert Rubin, immediately claimed an extensive effort was already under way to overhaul this architecture. Then in weighed Eisuke Sakakibara, a semi-official Japanese Government spokesman on matters financial to say that many world leaders would be starting to contemplate something along the lines of the Bretton Woods agreement. What's that? Bretton Woods? Whoa there boy! We're beginning to get a bit out of hand here.

There is a world of a difference between Mr Greenspan's measured calls for greater transparency, more effective contemporary surveillance, government regulation, supervision and the like, and the reinstatement of a fixed exchange rate system such as that of Bretton Woods. Nothing could be more out of place to

day than another Bretton Woods: it would run wholly counter to the highly effective and disciplined way in which the modern and now global capitalist system exposes and punishes underlying economic weaknesses.

So why is Mr Sakakibara, often known in the West as "Mr Yen" because of the effect of his comments on foreign exchange markets, proposing it? It is because Mr Sakakibara and many others in the Far East still refuse to see their economic crisis for what it is, the result of bad and corrupt government which attempted - disastrously as we have seen - to manipulate the capital markets to their own ends. Everyone wants to find a way of limiting the extremes of behaviour in the capital markets. But Bretton Woods is not the way.

"Electricity giant cuts £12 off household bills" makes a nice headline for an industry that is still hardly flavour of the month either with the Government or the consumer.

But the reality behind yesterday's announcement that National Power has decided to pass through £230m of cost savings to domestic customers, is somewhat different.

The price cuts NatPower proudly announced are already in the pipeline. They make up part of the £24 reduction in the average bill that the electricity regulator Professor Stephen Littlechild forced through last October. What NatPower's announcement re-

ally demonstrates is just what a topsy-turvy world it has become when the price of coal supplied to its power stations can tumble by more than 20 per cent and yet the net effect can be to wipe £130m off its bottom line.

Scarce surprise that its share price got a nasty shock along with PowerGen's. Eastern, the third biggest player in the fossil-fuel generating market, would also have felt the heat were its shares not so fired up by the bid battle currently being waged by a pair of US utilities.

The fact is that the demise of the cosy "back to back" deals whereby the generators bought over-priced British coal and then simply passed the costs on to the consumer via the regional electricity companies spells trouble not just for RJB Mining.

The big three suddenly find themselves squeezed between a government determined to do something to help the coal industry and a bunch of customers who are finally waking up to the fact that as their markets open to competition, they will have to buy supplies more competitively too.

The net result is that profit margins in the electricity business are likely to migrate away from the generators and towards the supply end of the business. It will not be a big migration but it will be enough to explain why PowerGen's Ed Wallis is so keen to buy a Rec.

None of this, of course, will deter Texas or PacificCorp from paying a ruinous price for Energy Group. But if the only people who get burned are shareholders in Dallas and Portland, then who's worrying?

# British Borneo admits it quit Cuba amid pressure from the US government

By Terry Macalister

BRITISH BORNEO, the independent oil company, yesterday revealed it pulled out of Cuba amid political pressure from the US State Department. The company, which has Sir Bob Reid, former British Rail boss, as a non-executive director, is being investigated by State Department officials alongside Premier Oil and Canada's Genoil.

They are under review over possible breaches of the Helms Burton embargo legislation, under which travel visas to the US can be revoked. Steve Holliday, international director of British Borneo, said it left Cuba late last year. Asked if politics was a reason, he said: "It would be naive to say it was not a consideration."

But he said a range of issues

were taken into account. British Borneo held a licence for block 21 and drilled a well near the producing Pina field. It also did seismic tests looking for oil on block 11 but would not comment on whether there were commercial opportunities.

Mr Holliday said State Department officials asked his company to supply information about their Cuban activities. He added: "We do not expect to hear any more from them."

Charles Jamieson, chief executive of Premier, confirmed he too had been asked to give details of activities in Cuba. "We have spoken to State Department officials on questions of clarification," Premier also said. "We have not been granted exploration licences. It planned to start drilling a first well this year."

Mr Jamieson said Premier had taken legal advice before starting work in Cuba. "As far as we know the land we are operating on is now owned by Americans," Premier is the original licence holder of blocks 21 and 18. In the past it spoke of "good prospectivity" for larger oil-bearing structures, but they were located at deep levels, making them harder to drill.

The Helms Burton Act was introduced in March 1996. It was implemented by Congress following the shooting down of a US aircraft on the island. Under Title Four of Helms Burton, US visas can be revoked for any executives, their family or shareholders of any company found to be "trafficking in properties confiscated from US citizens or businesses."

A spokesman for the State

Department confirmed talks were going on with British Borneo and Premier and stressed this did not mean the companies were guilty at this moment. A long process of investigation is carried out before a company and its executives are formally informed they have fallen foul of the legislation.

Even then it is possible for an excluded company to negotiate a settlement. But the State Department official added: "We try to be careful about who we question, hence the small number of companies being investigated."

Only one company, Sheritt International of Canada, is currently on the list of embargo-breakers. Two others have either settled with US owners or corrected their violations in other ways.

# Ailing Mulberry issues third profit warning in 10 weeks

By Nigel Cope  
City Correspondent

MULBERRY, the troubled luxury goods group, delivered more bad news for investors yesterday when it issued its third profit warning in 10 weeks. Shares lost 35 per cent of their value to close at 37p, their lowest level since the company was floated on the Alternative Investment Market in May 1996. The shares were then priced at 153p.

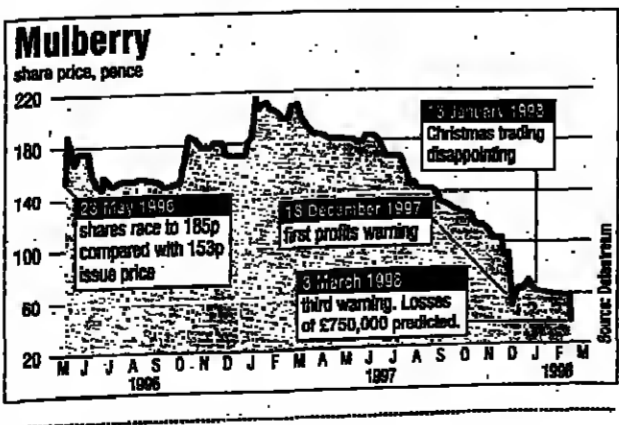
Analysts questioned yesterday whether Mulberry, valued at £8m, had a future as an independent company. "Its best protection is that the founder owns 60 per cent of the shares," one analyst said.

Mulberry said its profits for the year to 31 March would now fall "significantly short of expectations", due to the continued strength of sterling. It now expects to produce a pre-tax

loss of £750,000 "at best" after exceptional costs of £600,000. It is cutting 28 jobs across the group at a cost of £200,000, in addition to £400,000 redundancy costs previously announced. All small leather goods production will be shifted from Britain to Spain and Italy.

The company has pledged to maintain the dividend. Roger

Saul, chairman and founder, and finance director Godfrey Davis have waived their right to their £71,000 dividend payment. "It is bitterly disappointing to announce this news," Mr Saul said. "We... are being punished by the strength of sterling. Compared to last year, for every £10m of export sales, we have lost £2.5m."



# Spring Ram turns losses into a profit

By Terry Macalister

SPRING RAM, the former black sheep of the stock market, yesterday came leaping back to health with its profits and dividend payment for three years. A new chief executive has been appointed from inside the company and Spring Ram said New Year trading looked good, with the first eight weeks of 1998 showing like-for-like sales up 17 per cent.

The chairman, Roger Regan, who was brought in three years ago as company director to resuscitate Spring Ram, said: "1997 has seen the group moving on to increasingly solid foundations."

Pre-tax profits of £0.5m in the 12 months to 3 January compared with a loss of £36.8m last time. A dividend of 0.1p has been paid, the first payout since 1994. The new chief executive is Steve Brown, former head of Spring Ram's core kitchen division. His promotion has been made on the back of a significant financial clean-up in kitchens.

This division moved from an operating loss of £1.9m in the first half of 1997 to an operating profit of £0.9m in a similar level of turnover.

Costs have been severely pruned with the closure of one of its two factories in Southampton. The bathrooms and acrylics side of the group's business also performed strongly. Mr Regan said the turnaround has taken longer than he expected. He says he will be around for at least this year and maybe next. "We have a strong recovery plan in progress. I want to delivery of it."

# EMU warning mars City trading records

By Diane Cople  
Economics Editor

TRADING in the City of London set new records last year, but a report trumpeting its success in international markets warned that staying outside the single European currency could pose a threat to some areas of business.

Turnover reached fresh highs in three key financial markets, according to a report from British Invisibles, the body which promotes financial and other services. For the first time, dealing in

United Kingdom equities exceeded a trillion pounds, rising 36 per cent compared with 1996 to £1,013bn. Although London is only the third biggest stock market for domestic equities, behind New York and Tokyo, it is the world's biggest relative to the size of the economy.

International trading in eurobonds climbed 45 per cent to £8,450bn, with seven-tenths of this business based in London.

And cross-border trading in foreign equities rose by 39 per cent to £1,443bn last year. Here London has a 62 per cent share of global business.

The report acclaimed London's dominant position, and said some City activities could benefit from the start of EMU even with Britain staying outside. For example, it argued that the London Stock Exchange could benefit from an upsurge in European equities trading across borders.

The report warned of a particular threat to trading in EMU-area bonds, where the City's position is currently strong. Multinationals might see merit in switching their business to banks in an EMU country, it said.

# New Zealand-born Coats Vyella chief is new head of the Post Office



A NEW Zealand-born businessman was today appointed to be the new chairman of the Post Office. Neville Bain, 57, will succeed Sir Michael Heron when he retires from the top job later this month. Mr Bain was group chief executive of Coats Vyella until he resigned a year ago and before that spent 27 years with Cadbury Schweppes, where he was deputy group chief executive. Mr Bain is currently chairman of Hogg Robinson and a non-executive director of Safeway, Scottish & Newcastle and Gartmore Scotland Investment Trust.

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## THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY ANDREW YATES

### Irish luck holds for CRH abroad

THE IRISH are famous for having a good time wherever they find themselves abroad. This trait has been typified by CRH, the country's largest building group, over the last few years. Based in Dublin, its push into international markets has been a great success, so almost three-quarters of its trading profits now come from abroad.

The big test last year was North America. Even though the United States economy enjoyed its sixth year of expansion in 1997, the construction industry has seen relatively modest growth of around 3 per cent per annum. And CRH wanted a strong performance there to show it could absorb its biggest acquisition yet, the \$3.2bn (£238m) purchase in 1996 of Ticon from BTR, plus the subsequent takeover of Allied Building Products.

The luck of the Irish has not deserted the group. Profits across the Atlantic jumped 40 per cent to IR£35.0m in 1997. That storming performance helped group pre-tax profits to soar ahead 26 per cent to IR£253m on turnover up 27 per cent at IR£3.2bn.

Despite acquiring a slew of businesses from Ticon to Caneras Cerro Negro in Argentina in the last two years, CRH still has an appetite for more. Gearing is just 35 per cent and interest cover a very comfortable 8.7 times. And it has five teams at work in North America alone looking for potential acquisitions. CRH is a significant generator of cash so the balance sheet is well positioned for expansion.

Chief executive Don Godson, who now has 20,000 employees, is by nature cautious. "We look to positive growth in all our regions in 1998, although probably at a slightly slower pace than a hectic 1997," he said yesterday. That said, "hectic" sums up a company that has been buying at companies at a furious rate and at the same time selling some smaller assets it deems peripheral. CRH is not likely to rest on its laurels.

For a start, the European operations are currently being reorganised along the line of the product-based structure that has worked so well in the US. That should help France and Germany where the building sector has been struggling.

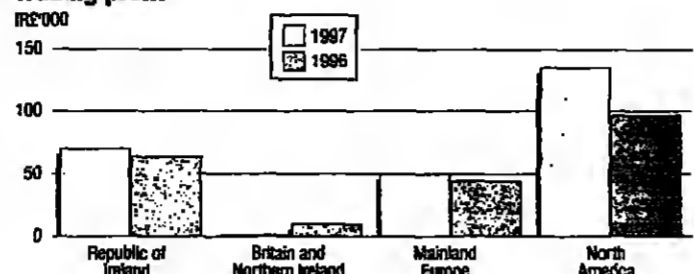
The shares slipped IR15p to IR£954.75p yesterday. Analysts believe CRH will come up with pre-tax profits of IR£279m this year, which would put it on a future multiple of 17.3. That

#### CRH: At a glance

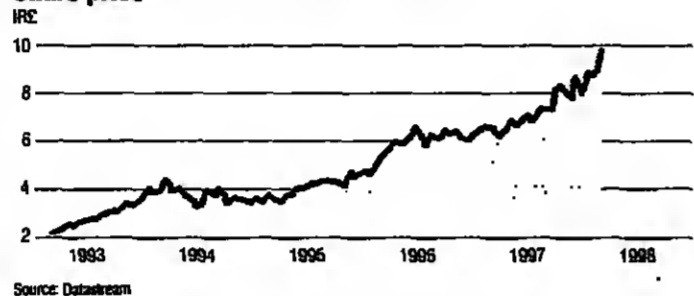
Market value: IR£3.65bn, share price 954.75p (1997)

Five-year record	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Turnover (£m)	1.4	1.8	1.9	2.4	3.2
Pre-tax profits (£m)	76.5	116.1	160.4	193.4	253
Earnings per share (p)	19.77	26.41	35.55	40.59	50.24
Dividends per share (p)	7.26	8.10	9.10	10.2	11.7

#### Trading profit



#### Share price



does not look cheap, but as long as the US economy does not suddenly take a nose-dive the rating seems justified for this well-managed group.

### Thistle axes 30 provincial hotels

THISTLE HOTELS is a prime example of how not to float on the stock market. Ever since the group came to the market in October 1996, it has proved a huge disappointment. Not only did it commit the cardinal sin for a newly quoted group by consistently missing analysts' profit forecasts, but it has continued to lag behind its peers in the hotel sector.

Robert Peel, the group's embattled chief executive, paid the penalty by getting the boot last autumn. Although he can hardly grumble at a £700,000 pay-off.

With Mr Peel out of the way, Thistle has decided to take the sword to its hotel estate. Thirty provincial hotels are to go, with the £100m or so proceeds pumped back into its London four-star hotel estate. The group has also launched a shake up of its hotel management team and a long-overdue upgrade of the group's information technology systems. And another £50m will be spent this year sprucing up its tired hotels. These are all sensible moves and there is plenty of scope to drive room rates forward by concentrating on the corporate market rather than tourists. After all, the only advantage of underperforming peers for the last few years is it gives greater potential to improve earnings in the future. But Thistle will have to start showing it can move room yields forward much more quickly than it has demonstrated in the past to calm investors' frayed nerves.

The City's concerns were demonstrated clearly yesterday when the shares fell 9p to 181.5p even though

Thistle announced a 34 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £80.6m in 1997. However, the hotel market is likely to remain buoyant for the foreseeable future, and analysts forecast current year profits of around £95m-£96m, putting the shares on a prospective p/e ratio of 14.

It is too early to say if Thistle has turned the corner but at least it appears to be moving in the right direction and a new chief executive should be appointed imminently. Fairly priced.

### Partco shares undervalued

YOU HAVE to feel for Partco. Reporting a 112 per cent increase in pre-exceptional profits to £28.5m yesterday, the car-parts distributor could reasonably have hoped for an upbeat response. In fact, the shares struggled up just 4p to 329.5p. In the past year, they have gone nowhere.

The City's scepticism is easy to justify. Partco's growth is largely down to acquisitions - primarily Dana Distribution Europe, the distributor it bought for £103m a year ago. Even worse, those acquisitions have been funded by paper: in the past 18 months, Partco has tapped its shareholders for £111m through two large rights issues. Given that like-for-like sales growth across the group was just 2.5 per cent, investors are nervous that the breakneck expansion is not actually creating much value.

In fact, this is unfair. The main distribution business managed 5 per cent growth - ahead of the market as a whole. But the real rationale for the acquisitions is cost savings. Efficiency is improved by pushing more parts through its established distribution network. Larger volumes also mean cheaper purchasing. And on costs, Partco is delivering. Yesterday, it raised its estimate of the synergies from the Dana acquisition by £2m to £5m-£6m. Most of those will flow through next year.

That should be good news for margins, which rose by almost a full percentage point to 7.4 per cent last year, but still lag behind those of Finelst, Partco's closest competitor. Long term, the company aims for a return on sales of about 10 per cent.

Although Partco was being coy about acquisitions yesterday, the feeling is that the company will steer clear of large paper-funded deals for the next year or so. With that reassurance the shares, on a forward earnings multiple of just 11, look cheap.

## PEOPLE & BUSINESS

### JOHN WILLCOCK



EVERY schoolboy knows that a business wanting to call itself a bank has to get permission from the Bank of England first. So Colin Forsyth, "Governor" of The Sandwich Bank & Crust Company, found himself writing to Eddie George to get the go-ahead for his refreshments firm.

Mr Forsyth, writing from his palatial head office at 16 Market Square, Bicester, Oxfordshire, starts off: "As the fellow Governor of a central bank - moreover, one recently freed from political encumbrance - you will doubtless sympathise with me in my ongoing struggle against the dead hand of bureaucracy..."

"In short, it seems that I have to ask clearance from you before I can operate my modest sandwich business under its present banner."

I am happy to say that Steady Eddie granted Mr Forsyth's wish, although the sandwich business will not be allowed to take deposits or trade in derivatives.

Incidentally, Mr Forsyth refers to his satisfied customers as "The Fed". Will Alan Greenspan have to be informed?

The press office at Howard Davies's fledgling Financial Services Authority (FSA) is finally beginning to take shape at Canary Wharf. One spokesman, Peter Parker, has managed to combine his new role with publishing a book this week. In *The Shadow of Sharpeville: Apartheid and Criminal Justice*.

Mr Parker wrote the book with his wife Joyce Mokhesi-Parker, from whom he is currently separated. Mrs Mokhesi-Parker's brother was one of six people arrested and tried after the Sharpeville riots in South Africa in September 1984, charged with the murder of the Mayor of Sharpeville.

The book, published by Macmillan, is based on letters from the Sharpeville Six, who were sentenced to death and only reprieved 18 hours before they were due to be hanged.

Betty Powell, a former spokeswoman for the SIB, who has been helping out at the FSA press office, said yesterday that they were all very proud of Mr Parker's achievement and had presented him with a bottle of champagne.

Footy-mania is definitely getting out of hand. A City spin doctor was trying to buy a Manchester United tie to present to a business contact this week, and told me yesterday that the club had a three-week waiting list for the drafted things.

Luckily, Soccer Scene of Carnaby Street came up with the goods. Perhaps we need a Secondary Market in Man U paraphernalia.

The latest edition of *The Economist* has a feature which pokes fun at books about Asia written before the current financial crisis. Books such as *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century* (1995) by Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, and Shintaro Ishihara, a Japanese nationalist politician, which predicted that the combined GNP of Asia would exceed that of the US and Europe by 2000.

*The Economist* has fun with such forecasts, now the Asian Tigers have gone phut. Modestly, it does not mention that *The Economist's* own editor and one-time Japan correspondent, Bill Emmott, has written three books since 1989, all of which managed to cast doubt on the then fashionable image of Japan as an all-conquering threat to western economies.

The last, published in 1993, was titled *Japanophobia: The Myth of the Invincible Japan*, in which Mr Emmott dismissed the threat of Japan as "an hysterical canard".

BBA Group, the engineering business, has appointed two high-profile non-executive directors, David Rough, a director of Legal & General and Richard Stittwell, executive vice president, industrial specialities at ICI.

Mr Rough has spent a quarter of a century at the centre of the City's fund management community, while there is not much that Mr Stittwell doesn't know about speciality chemicals and international marketing.

Incidentally, how does Vanni Treves find time to be chairman of BBA Group, senior partner of City law firm Macfarlanes, head of Channel Four and chairman of two other companies, as well as adviser to Richard Branson, all at the same time? He tells me on the phone: "It's all down to the art of delegation and mutual support - and I've got three partners here in my office all nodding their heads."

In an effort to show our European partners that British business is ready for the euro, despite the UK not being in the "first wave" of currency harmonisation, the CBI has sent a group of representatives to Brussels via Eurostar. The three-day mission, which embarked yesterday, is led by CBI London chairman Michael Frye and includes London Minister Nick Raynsford.

And to cap it all, the CBI has taken a steel band to play in the main square of Brussels. Should wake up the Eurocrats at the very least.

Simon Weldon has jumped ship from Fidelity International to join Premier Portfolio Managers as the latter's head of institutional sales. Mr Weldon's brief is to develop contacts with discretionary fund managers and independent financial advisers.

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★★★ Hotel Gaudi from £209pp Overlooking the impressive Guell Palace, in prime location just 50 metres from Las Ramblas and Barcelona's tempting shops, bars and restaurants.

★★★★ Hotel Almirante from £219pp Enjoying a prime city location, the Almirante is well placed for Barcelona's main sights and a short walk from the magnificent Cathedral and port. £7 supp pppn for Mon - Thu

##### Madrid

(departures from Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester and Glasgow)

★★★ Hotel Regina from £179pp Boasting an excellent position, the Regina is within easy walking distance of the main museums and only 100 metres from the lively Puerta del Sol.

★★★★ Hotel Riena Victoria from £229pp

Built at the turn of the century and situated in the heart of Old Madrid in the Plaza San'Ana, the Riena Victoria is very conveniently placed for the Prado museum and the main shopping area and close to many of Madrid's best restaurants. £2 supp pppn for Mon - Thu arrivals

## A tale of two cities

**Barcelona** Renowned as Europe's most exciting city, Barcelona is a stylish, architecturally stunning, cosmopolitan city that is the capital of Catalonia and a superb destination for a short break. Since the 1992 Olympic Games, Barcelona has undergone a huge transformation and is a delight to wander round and explore.

The wonderful Modernist architecture of Gaudi and others make every street a visual treat and in addition, there are many more places to visit than you will find in any other second city.

#### Madrid

The capital and geographical heart of Spain, Madrid is a lively, booming city that is

ideal for a short break. Apart from the excellent shopping and night life, Madrid's main attraction is its outstanding art galleries. These include the Prado, the Reina Sofia, together they make use of the finest collections in the world. The beautiful medieval cities of Toledo, Avila and Segovia are all within 90 minutes of Madrid

## Delphi shares crash by 15%

By Peter Thal Larsen

INVESTORS were yesterday reminded of the dangers of investing in information technology stocks when Delphi, the IT recruitment and services company, reported disappointing results after apparently losing control of its US subsidiary.

Shares in Delphi crashed 124p - or 15 per cent - to 703.5p after the company reported pre-tax profits of £14.1m - well below analysts' expectations of £15.5m.

Tony Reeves, chairman and chief executive, said the shortfall was because US staff did not work as many hours as expected in the final quarter of the year, but were still paid. "Most of our contractors are on the payroll," he said. "But during the final quarter it turned out that many of them were sick or on holiday."

He also admitted that Delphi's management systems had failed by not warning them of the shortfall earlier.

Industry experts were perplexed at the news. "If you

can't produce excellent figures in this market, which is right at its peak, then when can you?" asked Ingrid von Hentschel, IT analyst with Beeson Gregory. Another observer said the figures were "very, very poor".

The problems have forced Delphi to abandon its plans to carry out a fundraising on Nasdaq, the US hi-tech stock market. Last year, the company came under fire from shareholders over plans to raise £35m from US investors. Although the company eventually won permission from its shareholders to go ahead with the listing, it promptly delayed the move until the spring of this year.

Permission for the fundraising expires at the end of April, which means that Delphi will have to ask shareholders for their approval again. Last night, experts said there was "no chance" that would be granted. But Mr Reeves maintained that a Nasdaq listing was important if the company was to be able to offer its US employees a stake in the business.

#### COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Australian Press News (F)	AS\$322m (AS\$304m)	AS\$50m (AS\$41m)	12.7c (12.2c)	nil
Chelston Group (F)	30.3m (19.0m)	-4.955m (-0.90m)	13.7p (7.22p)	4.3p (6.0p)
Spire Group (F)	90.3m (72.4m)	6.08m (6.23m)	18.2p (15.5p)	9.00p (8.0p)
CRH (F)	IR£3.21bn (2.52bn)	IR£238m (202m)	IR£0.2p (12.1p)	IR£11.7p
Delphi Group (F)	- (F)	12.9m (12.3m)	28.3p (33.0p)	7.2p
Hollis (F)	- (F)	1.63m (228.0m)	43.5p (22.4p)	17.5p (15.0p)
Intergroup Group (F)	45.2m (41.3m)	2.02m (1.83m)	8.88p (7.27p)	2.5p (2.4p)
Image Group (F)	394m (307m)	47.1m (32.0m)	22.2p (16.2p)	4.5p (4.2p)
Line Printing Book (F)	11.2m (10.0m)	1.5m (1.3m)	6.6p (5.4p)	1.6p (1.3p)
S Lytle (F)	10.4m (10.1m)	0.458m (0.182m)	6.00p (2.44p)	1.0p (0.75p)
M-H Group (F)	20.0m (18.2m)	3.0m (2.35m)	3.5p (2.0p)	1.25p (1.25p)
Parsons Food (F)	28.5m (22.8m)	2.0m (2.1m)	8.5p (8.7p)	5.2p (6.0p)
Partco (F)	386m (294m)	21.2m (10.5m)	21.1p (19.3p)	8.7p (8.0p)
Wierdo Group (F)	40.2m (52.1m)	3.9m (-13.7m)	5.4p (-32.0p)	2.2p (2.0p)
Sherrwood Ltd (F)	30.0m (24.62m)	3.10m (2.07m)	23.8p (19.2p)	5.4p (4.5p)
Southern Newspapers (F)	69.5m (47.3m)	8.8m (6.2m)	30p (23.3p)	6.0p (6.0p)
Spring Train Corp (F)	222.5m (227.7m)	0.5m (-95.8m)	nil (8.2p)	0.1p (nil)
Springwood (F)	14.9m (17m)	1.3m (0.700m)	6.11p (5.21p)	1.0p (0.8p)
Sting Group (F)	40.5m (43.7m)	-2.81m (-3.25m)	-5.9p (-7.8p)	nil
Thistle Hotels (F)	312.7m (292.3m)	82.6m (80.1m)	12.35p (-7.24p)	4.2p
Trademonster (F)	8.6m (2.44m)	0.241m (3.4m)	0.84p (44.0p)	nil

(F) - Final (I) - Interim

## Decision on Rolls-Royce sale within a month

GRAHAM Morris, chief executive Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, the luxury carmaker owned by Vickers, said yesterday that he expected a decision on the unit's sale to be reached within four weeks. Speaking to journalists at the Geneva motor show, he said that the outlook for Rolls-Royce had "never been better", and said he anticipated a 10 per cent gain in sales this year.

Mr Morris forecast that the new Rolls-Royce Scram model would eventually represent 40 per cent of the unit's worldwide sales. Vickers reports its full-year results today.

## Millennium jobs bonanza

A RECRUITMENT campaign worth £500,000 was launched yesterday, spearheaded by the British Institute of Inkeping, to help fill 230,000 new jobs expected to be created over the next five years in pubs, clubs and hotels. The licensed retail industry said 630 jobs would be on offer every week into the millennium, ranging from bar work to catering, managerial and financial posts. A special work-experience day is being organised as well as recruitment roadshows, backed by a £210,000 government grant.

## Andersen revenue up 25%

ANDERSEN Consulting shrugged off its bitter dispute with sister organisation Arthur Andersen by reporting a 25 per cent rise in worldwide revenues, to \$6.6bn (£4bn). The Europe, Middle East, Africa and India region achieved the biggest gain - up 31 per cent to \$2.3bn - in the year to 31 December 1997. George Shaheen, worldwide managing partner of the firm, which employs 53,000 people in 47 countries, said the fourth consecutive year of more than 20 per cent growth was a result of sensing and responding to the needs of clients and the dynamics of the marketplace.

## Railtrack picks Tarmac

TARMAC, the construction and quarries group, has won a contract from Railtrack worth up to £90m. The contract, for work in East Anglia, was won by Centrac - part of Tarmac Construction Services - and is worth £18m a year for the next three years. An option to extend for two more years would raise the total to £90m. From May, Centrac will renew more than 50 miles of railway track per year in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and north London.

## UBS analysts recruited

DEUTSCHE Morgan Grenfell, the investment banking arm of Deutsche Bank, has recruited six equity analysts for its European research department in London. All six were previously employed at UBS, the Swiss bank that is making London analysts redundant as part of its merger with SBC. The new recruits are engineering analysts Mark Cusack and Peter Reilly, the number one-rated European media analyst Mark Bellby, transport analyst Charles Donald and Matthew Weston and technology analyst Ross Jobber.

## London International Group

THE amount of money that London International Group is investing for a 50 per cent share in a Chinese joint venture company, Qingdao London International Latex Company, is £2.2m not £1.8bn as we reported yesterday.

صلى الله عليه وسلم

International Group

Foreign Exchange Rates									
Country	Sterling		1 month		3 month		Dollar		D-Mark
	Spot						Spot		
UK	10000						0.6649	0.6058	0.6026
Australia	24322	24291	24220		14731	14766	14723	14723	0.8343
Canada	21042	21012	20941		12732	12729	12723	12707	0.6811
Belgium	61742	61545	61148		37343	37355	37355	37355	0.7844
Denmark	23464	23454	23395		14653	14652	14652	14652	0.8711
France	14031	13997	13966		86974	86982	86982	86982	3.8622
Germany	15179	15077	14999		10053	10048	10048	10048	0.7183
Finland	60737	60470	60181		36089	60544	60335	60335	1.0353
Italy	10251	10201	10168		18559	18559	17996	17996	0.8810
Japan	23953	23909	23935		12651	29630	28257	28257	0.5810
Netherlands	47933	47938	47938		27643	47736	47795	47795	1.2504
Portugal	62431	62378	62365		37075	37075	37075	37075	0.8580
Spain	12055	12042	12012		13715	13715	13715	13715	0.7822
Sweden	29454	29454	29454		12610	12545	12439	12439	0.8643
Switzerland	14031	13997	13966		86974	86982	86982	86982	1.4476
US	63477	63208	62948		37179	37390	37390	37390	0.7622
Argentina	14308				83330				1.4724
Brazil	33770	33603	33380		21039	21037	21037	21037	0.8810
New Zealand	22844	22874	22943		17008	17008	17008	17008	0.7337
Norway	12477	12477	12477		74659	75343	75343	75343	0.7131
South Africa	10535	10535	10535		86519	86498	86498	86498	0.8733
South Korea	65008	65002	64974		37374	37374	37374	37374	0.8579
Taiwan	17551	17549	17549		14225	14144	14069	14069	0.8478
Thailand	85026	85006	84945		49300	49680	50040	50040	1.0976
US	28318	28313	28313		15343	15343	15343	15343	0.7676
Sweden	24270	24270	24270		79800	79271	79271	79271	0.8425
Switzerland	14031	13997	13966		14890	14616	14507	14507	1.0357
US	10633				10000				0.7622

Other Spot Rates					
Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	16533	10000	Oman	0.8954	0.3850
Brazil	18892	10000	Pakistan	72.99	44000
China	13698	87790	Philippines	30.65	17000
Czech Rep	50003	23000	Poland	5.0983	34835
Egypt	58037	33897	Russia	6.0793	50000
France	10251	10201	Saudi Arabia	10.000	10000
Germany	15179	15077	South Korea	24778	149670
Ghana	10251	10201	Taiwan	32.849	33998
India	148787	90000	Thailand	43.738	188
Indonesia	15526	30440	UK	336265	39330
Israel	148787	90000	UAE	0.0728	36730
Japan	10251	10201			
Nigeria	198.88	84000			

Interest Rates					
Country	Bank	Rate	Country	Bank	Rate
UK	Base	7.25%	Germany	Discount	5.50%
US	Prime	8.50%	Japan	Discount	0.50%
France	Lombard	46.00%	US	Discount	5.00%
Intervention	3.50%	Discount	5.00%	Bağlam	2.75%
Italy	Base	5.50%	France	Central	3.75%
Belgium	Discount	5.00%	US	Repo	4.50%
Denmark	D-mark	5.00%	Sweden	Central	3.00%
Netherlands	Discount	3.50%	Switzerland	Lombard	2.75%
Spain	Discount	3.50%	Portugal	Lombard	2.75%

Bond Yields										
Country	3 mth	chg	1 yr	chg	3 yr	chg	5 yr	chg	10 yr	chg
Australia	4.90	-0.02	4.99	0.06	4.27	0.08	5.68	0.11	6.14	0.06
Canada	4.80	-0.01	4.75	0.01	4.52	0.00	4.45	0.01	5.06	-0.01
France	4.90	-0.01	5.11	0.02	5.30	0.02	5.37	0.06	5.60	0.08
ECU	4.34	0.00	4.33	-0.02	4.94	0.02	4.59	0.02	5.02	0.05
Germany	4.33	0.00	4.36	0.00	4.99	0.03	4.52	0.02	5.02	0.05
Italy	5.50	-0.01	6.03	0.12	4.71	0.01	4.89	0.00	5.30	0.02
Japan	4.07	0.04	4.50	0.04	4.02	0.02	4.18	0.02	4.88	0.02
Netherlands	5.47	0.00	3.76	0.00	4.03	0.04	4.49	0.02	5.00	0.03
Spain	4.40	0.00	4.45	0.03	4.29	0.03	4.47	0.03	5.37	0.03
Sweden	4.39	0.00	4.85	0.03	4.80	0.15	5.15	0.01	5.48	0.01
Switzerland	5.07	0.00	5.29	0.17	4.02	0.17	4.99	0.01	5.89	0.01
UK	7.00	0.00	7.57	0.00	6.80	0.05	6.37	0.05	6.30	0.06
US	5.08	-0.08	5.55	0.02	5.62	0.05	5.72	0.00	5.76	0.07

Money Market Rates				
Treasury Bill	Overnight		1 month	3 months
	1 week	1 month	1 month	3 months
LEON	7.26	7.01	7.26	7.01
LIBOR	7.26	7.01	7.26	7.01
LIBID	7.26	7.01	7.26	7.01
LIBOR	7.26	7.01	7.26	7.01
LIBOR	7.26	7.01	7.26	7.01
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# Ramprakash flowers in face of old defeatism

POST-MORTEMS of England's defeat on a cricket field are generally a straightforward business. But if explanations from the team's coaches - ranging from the pithy honesty of Keith "we played crap" Fletcher to the wild optimism of David "we flippin' murdered 'em" Lloyd - have reflected this in the past, the latest explanation, following Monday's crushing defeat by the West Indies, needs to incorporate the words delusion and defeatism.

England did not misread the pitch; only a dyslexic wearing sunglasses could have done that. What they misread was the effectiveness of pace bowlers would have on that pitch. As Lloyd pointed out, yesterday: "We didn't have two 6ft 7in fast bowlers hitting a crumbling pitch at 80 miles an hour." No, one of them - Andy Caddick - was 12lb man while the other - Angus

Fraser, still exhausted after his marathon efforts in Trinidad - had only two or three good spells in him.

Even before the game had started, England were arguing from false premises, basing their four-man bowling attack on an Australian model that includes a peerless leg-spinner and a top-class fast bowler, Glenn McGrath, now, incidentally, broken down from overuse. Aping this aspect of the Aussies' game is self-delusion on a grand scale, as was the notion that had England won the toss, then they too would also have won the game.

With two spinners and two seam bowlers, Atherton was committed to winning what was always going to be a crucial toss, even more so in the case of England's pace-light team. He didn't and boy did it show, particularly in England's cricket after lunch on the first day.

Derek Pringle, Cricket Correspondent, says England's excuses disguise the real reasons behind latest Test defeat to West Indies

Cricketers are not the most opaque of people. Generally their body language lays bare their innermost beliefs. By the time Brian Lara and Shivnarine Chanderpaul had finished with them, it did not need Desmond Morris to tell you that most of them knew that the game was up. The next day, the second of four, all but Alec Stewart, Mark Ramprakash and Robert Croft batted like men condemned to fate over which they had no dominion.

It is that kind of defeatism, peculiar to English cricket, that Stephen Bull, the team's psychologist - out here in Guyana until last Thursday - should really be tackling. It is a malaise that once again stems from the amount of domestic cricket played, where unpromising sit-

uations tend not to be fought for in the belief, often mistaken, that the next match will be different. England tend to play their Test cricket in much the same way, often fighting back with far more conviction than when confronted by parity and the chance to initiate proceedings rather than react to them after valuable ground has been conceded.

Generalisations rarely lend themselves to mitigation though, and the course of the match may well have differed had Stewart not dropped Chanderpaul on the first morning when the left-hander was on nine, some 109 runs short of his eventual contribution.

Although not all were straightforward, it was just one of a dozen chances missed, half of them by a hapless Jack Rus-

sell. The West Indies is a notoriously difficult place to keep wicket, but Russell is now so low in confidence that there is little difference between him and his counterpart, David Williams, a wicketkeeper not only too short for Tests but lightweight, too.

Russell has been a staunch and patient servant of England, but his time has surely now passed. Asking Stewart to keep may be loaded with risk, but with Russell hopelessly out of sorts with both bat and gloves, it has become a necessity rather than an option.

However, on that pitch - its components seemingly atomised every time a ball was banged in hard - it was back to the mismatches of a decade ago, when

English pea-shooters used to take on West Indian cannons. Without grass to help Fraser and Dean Headley, and with the game too far out of reach by the time Croft, but not Phil Tufnell, started to become effective, England did not begin to compete until it was too late. As Lloyd put it: "We didn't play at our maximum when conditions dictated we had to play above our maximum to compete."

For Atherton's team, the imbalance between bad and good cricket, particularly among the batsmen, once more cost them the game. Mind you, as Lloyd pointed out: "Batting in those conditions was a severe examination especially against [Curtly] Ambrose and [Courtney] Walsh. Their difference in height and pace made it more difficult."

For that reason, Ramprakash's innings, particularly the one he played under great duress

in the first stand when England needed to avoid the follow-on, was a revelation as, to a lesser extent, was Croft's.

Given his previously chequered history at this level, and against this opposition, Ramprakash's late germination allows England to leave here with more genuine optimism than might otherwise have been the case with three front-line batsmen, Atherton, Hussain and Thorpe, again having underperformed.

"The mood is much better than it was after the loss in Trinidad," confirmed Lloyd yesterday. "We know we've been turned over here, but there's a real roll-your-sleeves-up-and-let's-get-on-with-it optimism regarding the next Test in Barbados."

"As soon as we'd lost, I got everyone together in the dressing-room and told them to for-



Atherton: Batting poorly

get that game. It was finished. We all know we've got to get a positive attitude for Barbados, not next week, but now from today. We know we're every bit as good as this opposition, and we know we can come back at them again."

Whether the pitch in Bridgetown or whether Ambrose and Walsh will allow a repeat of four years ago, when England stormed to victory, is what an estimated 10,000 England supporters here are eagerly waiting to see.

## Hill may regret first big mistake

DAMON HILL is dutifully putting on a brave face as he confronts an unending barrage of queries about his prospects for the new season, but those who see him away from the gaze of the cameras say his dismay is all too apparent.

Privately, he must be asking himself how he can justify turning down a chance of joining McLaren-Mercedes and opting instead for Jordan Mugen-Honda. Those who suggested his motivation was money rather than a quest for a second world championship maintain they have been vindicated, and Hill admits he was unimpressed with McLaren's financial proposition.

There is a belief his response was anticipated and welcomed by McLaren, all part of Formula One's political games. Whatever the substance of that theory, the reality now, on the eve of another campaign, is that Hill has palpably chosen the wrong car.

While the McLaren has been setting the pace in pre-season testing and earning the status of title favourite, the Jordan has been lagging ominously behind, sitting among midfield scavengers who will be hoping to pick up odd points here and there.

One Briton unlikely to be weeping for Hill is David Coulthard, whose position at McLaren was seemingly put in jeopardy by the team's negotiations with the former champion. Coulthard and Mika Hakkinen, who was also retained after Hill ruled himself out of the equation, have the car of the moment.

Hill concedes: "It would be unrealistic for us to think in

As Britain's drivers prepare for the new grand prix season which starts this weekend, the former world champion may already be stymied by his choice of car, says Derick Allsop

terms of the championship at this stage. I always felt this was going to be a two-year effort, anyway. But that's not to say we won't be going into the season in a positive frame of mind."

Not, however, as positive as he and Eddie Jordan would have envisaged. The car has patently disappointed the team so far and lap times appear to

depart frustrated, if a lot richer. Another £4.5m would be some consolation this year and at least Jordan start further up the ladder and have the resources to improve. To a point.

The big points beckon for Coulthard, now sensing the chance to firmly establish himself as Britain's No 1 driver and mount a genuine challenge for the championship. He was adamant all last summer he was optimistic of keeping his place at McLaren and that this was the place to be. His judgement appears impeccable.

McLaren are in the ascendancy, Adrian Newey's car flying clear of the rest the moment it was released from its box. If Mercedes can achieve the reliability to match the undoubted power of their engine, and the Bridgestone tyres fulfil their promise, then the Woking package will prove irresistible.

Which would leave Coulthard to see off his generally more fancied team-mate and prove he is worthy of the championship. Still not 27, the Scot ought to have time on his side, but such is the competitive nature of this business he knows there is no guarantee of another such opportunity. A member of the team said: "I've never seen David more focused."

Coulthard concurs: "I've prepared for this season better than for any other. I've left nothing to chance. Physically



Testing times: Damon Hill inspects his Jordan after spinning off the practice track in Barcelona last week

Photograph: Empics

and mentally I'm ready. "I had a short break at the end of last season, then got stuck into my training and I've worked really hard on my fitness. It was good to know that every night while I was in the gym, the other drivers were sitting watching CNN."

"When you are fitter physically it helps you become stronger mentally. You are more alert, and that has been evident through the testing."

Despite the McLaren's speed in testing, however, Coulthard, like Hakkinen, insists the real gauge will be after Sunday's opening grand prix in Melbourne. Coulthard

said: "The car appears to be good, but until we actually start racing we don't know anything for sure. We certainly hope to be competitive and I've been confident all along that we would have a car capable of winning races."

"At the same time we know that Williams will be strong, Ferrari will be strong and Benetton will be strong. And of course my team-mate will be very competitive."

Hakkinen finished last season the more convincing of the two, even if Coulthard was placed higher in the championship. That might be seen as a psychological advantage for

the Finn, although not by Coulthard.

He said: "Mika's quick and had some good races towards the end of last year, but that could be down to the fact that those particular circuits suited him. Perhaps I'll find the circuits early in the season suiting me again. Mika's form certainly hasn't affected my confidence. I believe in myself and always have done. I'm not saying I'm going to do that or the other, just that I know if the car is OK I can deliver the results."

Northern Ireland's Eddie Irvine is the only member of the leading teams not permitted ambitions of the championship,

even if his car proves the best in the field. However, he still has to convince a sceptical Italian audience he is deserving of the Ferrari seat alongside Michael Schumacher.

Irvine's times in testing have compared favourably with the German's and he is in apparently good spirits, but non-committal about his prospects for the season.

He said: "I'm feeling reasonably good but you never know until the season starts. I think we have worked well and should be pretty good, but we'll find out soon, won't we?"

Johnny Herbert, the Englishman at Sauber, confronts an

intriguing domestic duel with a new team-mate, the gifted but tempestuous French-Sicilian, Jean Alesi. "So far there hasn't been any problem, he's been easy to get on with," Herbert said.

The testing has been less encouraging. Herbert described a recent stint at Barcelona as "the worst I've had at Sauber". Reliability has been the elusive factor.

Many respected observers believe the new regulations, introducing narrower cars and grooved tyres, ought to suit the unfulfilled Herbert. The pity is he will again be stuck with a midfield car.

## Wales try to rebuild shattered confidence with wholesale changes

Rugby Union

By Chris Hewett

KEVIN BOWRING, the Wales coach, may have been "embarrassed, hurt and humiliated" by the capitulation of his side during their Five Nations nightmare at Twickenham 11 days ago, but he was emphatic in his insistence yesterday that the Welsh Rugby Union was fully behind his latest attempt to rebuild national morale. It was an uncomfortable moment, as any football manager might have pointed out, Bowring would do far better to keep his employers in front of him, where he can see them.

The former London Welsh flanker is far too shrewd and in-

telligent an operator not to realise that his backside is squarely on the line following the 60-point searing to from England. Bowring has made eight changes, two of them positional, for this weekend's "home" match with Scotland at Wembley and the wholesale renovation work looks and smells as though it was carried out in some dark corner of the Last Chance Saloon.

"My contract runs through to next year's World Cup," said Bowring, fully aware that Richie Dixon, Brian Ashton, Willie Anderson, Dick Best and Bob Dwyer had contracts too. The critical fall-out from Twickenham has been so poisonous as to border on the ra-

dioactive and defeat this weekend would generate such public opprobrium that the WRU might feel obliged to act.

Terry Cooney, Wales' director of rugby, set the emotional tone for yesterday's hair-shirt session in Cardiff. "When I go to bed at night, the England disappointment is the last thing I think of when I wake up in the morning, it's the first thing on my mind," he admitted.

Bowring seemed equally prepared to wear his heart on his sleeve as he described the debilitating experience of the last week or so. "It's been so painful, not just for me but for my family and friends," he said.

"The history of the Wales-England fixture means so much

to the people here. It represents the small country taking on the might of the big country and when we do well, it lifts the nation. We didn't lift anyone at Twickenham, we let them down." The subtext of his words was clear. He dare not let anyone down this time.

Bowring has placed his immediate future in the hands - or, to be more accurate, the right boot - of Neil Jenkins, who returns at outside-half for the more extravagantly gifted Arwel Thomas. Jenkins' performance at Twickenham in the full-back position he so publicly detests was almost too painful to watch and for the coach to make Thomas one of the scapegoats for an insipid forward display

akin to blaming Van Gogh for a shortage of paintbrushes.

Still, the deed is done; Jenkins' return to life at No 10 may mean fewer moments in the sun for the likes of Allan Bateman and Gareth Thomas, but he is at least capable of playing the percentages sufficiently well to keep the Scots in the dark. To that end, Bowring has beefed up his front five by recalling Garin Jenkins at hooker, and Andy Moore, the restart specialist, at lock.

Other changes see Kevin Morgan at full-back and a reshaped back row featuring Kingsley Jones, the Ebbw Vale captain, alongside two more Swansea men, Rob Appleyard and Colin Charvis. That means

a pointed relegation for Scotti Quinnell, whose contribution at Twickenham subsided from the intermittent to the non-existent.

Ireland, meanwhile, have recalled Eric Elwood and Conor McGuinness at half-back for their thankless trip to France. Rob Henderson replaces the injured Mark McColl at centre while Victor Costello fills in for the flu-ridden Eric Miller at No 8. The new coach, Warren Gatland, will choose between two open-side flankers, Kieron Dawson and the uncapped Andy Ward, later this week.

Ireland team, Sporting Digest, page 27

### Wales team

(v Scotland, Wembley, Saturday)

- K Morgan (Pontypridd)
  - W Proctor (Llanelli)
  - A Bateman (Richmond)
  - S Gibbs (Swansea)
  - G Thomas (Cardiff)
  - N Jenkins (Pontypridd)
  - R Howley (Cardiff, cap)
  - A Lewis (Cardiff)
  - G Jenkins (Swansea)
  - D Young (Cardiff)
  - M Voyle (Llanelli)
  - A Moore (Swansea)
  - R Appleyard (Swansea)
  - K Jones (Ebbw Vale)
  - C Charvis (Swansea)
- Replacements: L Davies (Cardiff), A Thomas (Swansea), P John (Pontypridd), S Quinlan (Richmond), S Roy (Pontypridd), L Muesoe (Cardiff), J Humphreys (Cardiff).

## Agassi keeps his comeback rolling along

Tennis

ANDRE AGASSI went through to the second round of the Franklin Templeton Classic in Scottsdale, Arizona, by beating the sixth seed, Albert Porras, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2, on Monday night.

The former world No 1 finished 1997 ranked 122nd, but having beaten the No 1, Pete Sampras three weeks ago to win his first title in almost two years, Agassi is back in the top 50. He was given a wild card into this tournament, which he won in 1993 and 1994.

"Once I started stepping up the pace with my shots, I was more accurate with my footwork, and he was unable to respond. It felt like I remembered it," said Agassi, who won 12 of the final 15 games of Monday's match. "I need to work on everything... [But] the hardest part is over now. It's just about routine and doing it every day."

Earlier, Carlos Costa, of Spain, had beaten the third seed, Magnus Norman of Sweden, 6-4, 7-6, and Dominik Hrbaty of Slovakia knocked out the seventh seed Julian Alonso of Spain 6-2, 6-2. Another seed to fall was the No 5, Spain's Francisco Claver, who lost 4-6, 7-6, 6-4 to Jeff Tarango.

## Clubs nip upstairs in attempt to bring Brittle to negotiating table

ENGLAND'S leading Premiership clubs will seek an early meeting with Cliff Brittle, the chairman of the Rugby Football Union's management board, to thrash out a solution to the latest political crisis over player availability for this summer's four-Test tour of the southern hemisphere, writes Chris Hewett.

Whether they actually get their meeting is a different matter altogether, as things stand, the clubs have more

chance of persuading Rupert Murdoch to publish a book entitled: "Why we hate China."

Both Brittle and the officers of the English Rugby Partnership, the joint RFU-club body charged with administering the domestic professional game, work from the same building at Twickenham, yet the last official contact between the two took place in October.

"He's upstairs, they're downstairs and they haven't talked in almost six months,"

said one baffled observer yesterday.

The clubs suspect that Brittle has no intention of discussing either of the major issues threatening the stability of the English game: the contracting of players and the structured fixture list. They have accused the RFU of breaking off negotiations on the preparation of a standard contract covering domestic and international rugby and believe Brittle and his colleagues

are preparing to pressure individual England players into signing lock, stock and barrel with the governing body. Indeed, insiders say Lawrence Dallaglio, the England captain, has already been targeted.

Donald Kerr, the ERP chairman, is planning an emergency meeting of his executive to discuss the decision of Northampton to ban their players from touring with England in June. Keith Barwell, the Saints owner and something of

a loose cannon among the owner-investors, says he has taken a unilateral stand to save his leading lights from burn-out.

Barwell has gone far further than any fellow owner in dictating to his charges and one of them, Tim Rodber, accepted yesterday that he would be spending the summer on a beach rather than on the playing fields of Brisbane, Auckland and Cape Town. "Keith is our boss and we can't disregard the man who is paying our salary

and giving us financial stability for the next five years," the Saints captain said.

"Ultimately, he is looking after his employees in the interests of Northampton. We've signed a contract with the club. Whatever happens, I'll be fresh for next season."

The Saracens squad met their employer, Nigel Wray, yesterday but were not told in so many words that they would not be permitted to tour. Wasps, who have Dallaglio under contract,

have distanced themselves from an outright ban, while Bath insist that the decision will be left to individuals.

However, the clubs will attempt to present a united front in an effort to force the contract issue on to the RFU agenda. "We want it sorted, as do the players," a clubs' spokesman said. "Keith made his pronouncement to initiate discussion. The only way anyone gets anything done is to suggest something outrageous."

# Spackman's tale of the unexpected

In his last interview as manager of Sheffield United, Nigel Spackman gave few clues to Guy Hodgson about yesterday's surprise

YOU would think football could no longer surprise. In a sport where managers and players do things that defy reason almost daily it is an occasion for eyebrows to shoot skyward when convention is the norm rather than the bizarre. Yet Nigel Spackman's resignation as Sheffield United's manager yesterday was a shock.

At 3.45pm on Monday I had left him cheerfully contemplating United's FA Cup quarter-final at Coventry City this weekend. He was not blissfully content, but, if anything, he appeared to be more resigned to the difficulties of being manager at Bramall Lane than inclined to offer his resignation. "When will the article appear?" he asked as we parted. "Could you send me a copy?" Earlier he had been laughing with his assistants, Russell Slade and Steve Thompson. These were not the comments and actions of a man anxiously wrestling with a difficult choice. He was excited about being fifth in the First Division and at the tantalising proximity of Wembley. The mood change came later that evening.

It is more difficult to understand the timing than in discern the reasons why. Brian Deane, Jan Åge Fjørtoft, Carl Tiller, Mitch Ward and, last week, Don Hutchison had been sold and he was operating on a player's contract because the club was haggling over his managerial terms. Losing his coach, Willie Donachie, to Manchester City last week must have pushed him closer to the last straw.

It sounds like a recipe for chaos, I had said to him, pointing out that there would have been shareholders with violent intent if a major public company (Sheffield United are listed on the London stock market) such as ICI operated in such an unconventional manner. He smiled, thought carefully, and replied: "Those are your words not mine."

"That's football," he continued after a further pause. "There's always something that makes you look up in surprise. It's opened my eyes in this seat, watching the ups and downs, the comings and goings. They are things you have to cope with as a manager, the sort of things as a player you wouldn't dream of being

done. It's not just a case of picking the team and coaching, it's all the other things.

"I've got agents phoning 24 hours a day, faxes coming in, TV crews and reporters to deal with. It's nice when you're doing well, so I hope it will continue because things can turn round quickly in football."

Spackman will have a greater understanding of that last sentence this morning. He became manager ahead of his own timescale and voluntarily reduced to the ranks of a player again after nine months of success dredged from an unpromising, not to say nearly impossible, position. How he can be expected to train and perform for his successor is a dilemma the new man will not enjoy tackling.

A clever midfield player with Bournemouth, Chelsea, Liverpool, Queen's Park Rangers and Glasgow Rangers, who would have won England caps but for a series of untimely injuries, Spackman was pointed towards Bramall Lane by an 18-month lay-off. He expected to serve an apprenticeship as Howard Kendall's playing assistant until the managerial sorcerer left for Everton last summer.

"I thought if I came in with Howard and spent two or three years with him he might decide to move upstairs or do something else. I thought I'd get my chance, but it came at least 12 months earlier than I anticipated. I decided that if I was a failure then at least I'd given it a try. I wouldn't be thinking 'if only' in my next job."

Some failure. The Blades did not suffer their first defeat until Walsall beat them in the Coca-Cola Cup third round and it was 25 October before their first League reverse. Even with players disappearing like a magician's rabbits - Deane with 13 goals and Fjørtoft 12 are still the Blades' top scorers - they maintained an unbeaten home record that was extended to 24 games on Saturday.

"It just shows the character of the players we have got here really," Spackman said. "Things were going very well at the start but the team began changing because of injuries to Dane Whitehouse, Wayne Quinn and Paul McGrath and then there were the transfers. It feels like people

have been coming and going all season. You get to a point where it becomes normality and you have to get on with it."

How many players had left against his wishes? "I can't really say," he replied. "That's a political matter, isn't it? Obviously, to lose your two top

scorers on the same day - 15 January - wasn't the best thing that could happen, but all credit to the other lads who went out the following Saturday and beat Wolverhampton Wanderers 1-0, playing some very good football. That was a tribute to the spirit here and their ability."

That spirit, rather than their ability you suspect, will be under duress on Saturday when United will be expected to rise from the rubble of domestic strife to tackle Coventry of the Premiership. They were underdogs before Spackman's departure; now they could be

barking and hiding without a lead.

"We would have preferred a home draw," Spackman said, "but we've nothing to lose. The pressure's on Coventry, who are expected to win. That's the romance of the Cup. You know anyone can get to the final.

While you're still in you've got a chance."

Sadly, Spackman will only be "in" if he plays for Sheffield United again this season, but that can be safely consigned to the pigs might fly category. A manager's job elsewhere will surely be offered soon.



Nigel Spackman: 'It feels like people have been coming and going all season. You get to a point where it becomes normality' Photograph: Peter Jay

## Jamaica set for 'carnival' at QPR

JAMAICA'S "Reggae Boys", who were refused permission to play the Republic of Ireland at Loftus Road, will instead take on Queen's Park Rangers at the First Division club's ground. They will field a full-strength side in a testimonial for the Rangers' midfielder Simon Barker on 22 March.

It will be the first time the Jamaicans, whose squad includes English-based players, have appeared in Europe.

The Jamaican Football Federation's president, Horace Burrell, said: "We hope the Jamaicans in London pack the QPR ground to capacity for this worthy cause."

Paul Murray, QPR's England B international, is out for the rest of the season after breaking his leg at Norwich on Saturday.

Aberdeen have decided against sacking their Bulgarian midfielder, Ilian Kirilov, after he apologised for spitting at Jim McStay during last Saturday's match against Kilmarnock. He has been fined two weeks' wages, £8,000.

Tranmere Rovers have signed Dariusz Kubiak, a Poland defender, on loan from their First Division rivals Wolves until the end of the season.

Bournemouth, chasing promotion from the Second Division, have signed the striker Mark Stein on loan from Chelsea until the end of the season.

Swindon made a loss of £662,097 in the year ending June 1997, leaving the First Division club with total debts of almost £4.5m. Their manager, Steve McMahon, has been told he cannot have any more money to spend on new players. McMahon has been charged with misconduct by the Football Association after being dismissed from the dug-out during his side's 1-0 win at Port Vale on 17 February.

Dennis Wise has been called before an FA disciplinary panel after becoming the first Premiership player to accumulate 11 bookings this season.

Brighton are considering a ground-share with Sussex County Cricket Club. The Seagulls, who sold the Goldstone Ground two years ago and now play "home" matches 73 miles away at Gillingham, have held talks with Sussex about constructing a multi-sports site, including football and cricket venues.

Tottenham's coach, Christian Gross, will contact Aimé Jacquet this week to press David Ginola's claims for a recall to the France squad for the World Cup finals. Ginola last played for France in their last qualifying match for the 1994 World Cup, when a last-minute goal by Bulgaria eliminated them.

### Sporting Digest

## Radcliffe keeps options open

### Athletics

PAULA RADCLIFFE has decided to keep her options open about competing in two events at the World Cross-Country Championships in Morocco later this month.

Radcliffe, who is training in New Mexico, had been named by Britain for both the eight-kilometre and four-kilometre teams at the meeting in Marrakech on 21 to 22 March, but

says she is still uncertain whether to attempt a tough double.

She took the silver medal over the longer distance last year, but is not convinced she will be strong enough to cope with the 4km race, a new addition to the schedule on the second day.

"I asked the selectors to include me in the 4km team only if there was a vacancy," Radcliffe said. "Being honest,

it's 50-50 whether I do both races."

Conscious of how tired she felt after her second place behind Derarthy Tulu in Turin, Radcliffe is under no illusions about the difficulty of doing the double. "I felt shot to pieces the following day," she said, an indication she may settle for winning gold over the traditional distance rather than risk falling between two hurdles.

## Pearce is brushed aside by Vincent

### Bowls

BERYL VINCENT needed just 15 ends to brush aside Pat Pearce, of the Preston club in Brighton, 21-6 to win the Champion of Champions Singles event at the English Women's Indoor Championships in Great Yarmouth.

Vincent, of Thibridge in Devon, edged into a 4-2 lead after five ends and at the close of the 10th had increased her advantage, to 11-6. She then moved into an overdrive and a run of 2-1-3-3-1 secured victory.

In the semi-finals, Vincent had beaten Gloria Hamey, from Spelding in Lincolnshire, 21-11, while Pearce had seen off Yvonne Lyons, of Riverain, Hertfordshire, winning 21-17.

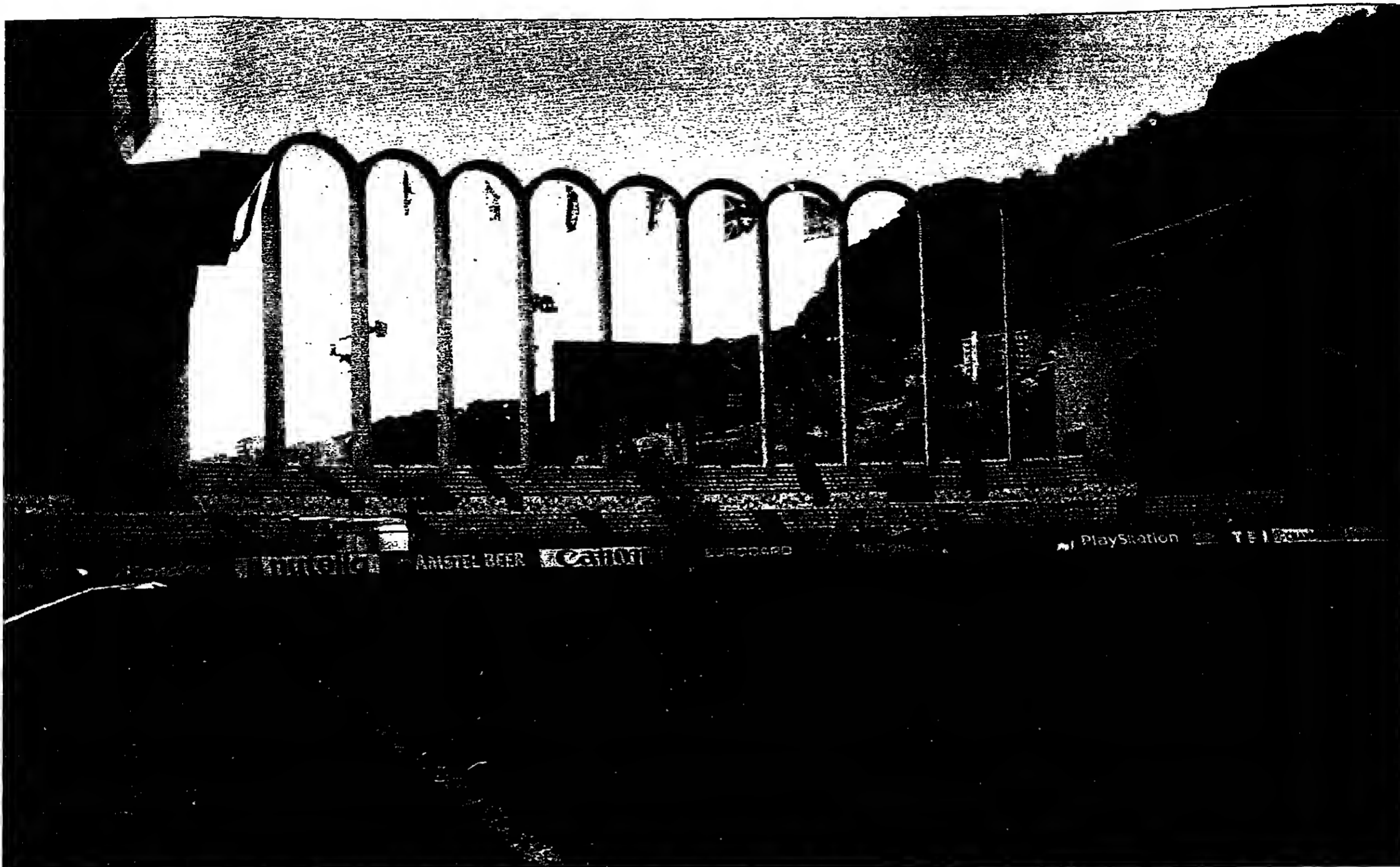
In the pairs championship, the defending champions, Mandy Jacklin and Catherine Anton of Peterborough, bowed out in the first round when they lost 21-17 to Janette Timlin and Chris Hlom of Boston.

### Baseball

NBA: Washington 98 LA Lakers 85; Charlotte 72 Golden State 55; Detroit 100 Dallas 84; San Antonio 76 Sacramento 55.

### Bowls

ENGLISH WOMEN'S INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS (Preston Leisure Centre, Gr. Yarmouth): Champion of Champions Singles event - Beryl Vincent (Preston, Brighton) 21-6 Pat Pearce (Preston, Brighton) 21-6. Pairs first round: Lisa Norfolk (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14 Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs second round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs third round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs fourth round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs fifth round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs sixth round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs seventh round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs eighth round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs ninth round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. Pairs tenth round: Lisa Norfolk & Stewie Harris (St Mark & St Paul) 21-14. 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Elegant resident of the principality: The Stade Louis II in Monte Carlo, the gloriously appointed stadium where Manchester United resume their European Cup quest in tonight's quarter-final first leg

Photograph: Ross Kinnaird/Allsport

## United the main event in Monaco

### Football

Glenn Moore  
reports from Monaco

FOOTBALL is played in many places, but even Manchester United's much-travelled players can have been to few like the location which hosts their return to Europe. There may be docks and roadworks nearby, but little else surrounding the Stade Louis II to remind them of the Salford industrial estate they call home.

While Old Trafford dominates the west Manchester skyline, Monaco's ground, carefully landscaped to blend in with the tiled-roofed luxury apartments of grand prix drivers and retired financiers, is barely visible from the Grimaldi palace above.

Tonight, however, the eyes of the world, if not the Principality, will be on the elegant stadium. Television crews from the United States to Japan are here to see if this quarter-final first leg will find Alex Ferguson's side taking another step in their quest to emulate Sir Matt Busby's Champions' Cup winners of 30 winters ago.

Twice as many media attended Ferguson's press conference as that of Jean Tigana, the Monaco coach. In response, Ferguson was cool and reserved. Tigana all toothy smiles and giggles. Was the United manager feeling the pressure while his opponent relaxed? No. When the television cameras and tape recorders were switched off, so was the professional mask. Ferguson, having

been careful not to give anything away nor to indicate either fear or over-confidence, now cracked jokes with English and French alike.

Tigana's demeanour, however, was indicative of the lesser expectation on the hosts. Football is a sideshow here and the biggest demands on them are from within: United carry the hopes of half a nation and the burden of history.

"The European games are special," Gary Neville said. "All the great sides have won the European Cup and that is the standard we want to set ourselves. It is important to win the trophy."

United are likely to go into the match with the team that finished Saturday's victory over Chelsea. Henning Berg and

Phil Neville continuing to deputise for Gary Pallister—who is out for another seven to 10 days—and Ryan Giggs. Monaco have injury doubts over several players including John Collins of Scotland, but the serious concern is David Trezeguet. The new French cap has a knee injury and is likely to be replaced by Thierry Henry. A more than useful deputy, he is the tournament's top scorer.

Monaco are billed as a counter-attacking team, but they are not just sprinters. Twice in the Champions' League stage they came back from 2-0 down, notably beating Sporting Lisbon 3-2 when the Portuguese side were defending in depth. The goalkeeper, Fabien Barthez, is the French No 1, Franck Dumas and Martin Djetou provide a

strong defensive core, the midfield is well-balanced and hard-working. Algeria's Ali Benarbia is the link with Nigeria's Victor Ikpeba, the current African player of the year, and Henry or Trezeguet.

United have plenty of threat themselves despite the loss of Giggs, their most potent attacking weapon. "Who is their pivotal player?" Tigana was asked. "This is the problem, there is not just one," he said.

The former French international midfielder, who yesterday eoded speculation about his future by extending his contract by two years, was gushing about United, but Ferguson said dismissively: "They all build us up. It's just talk" before heaping his own praise on Monaco, who he described as "the toughest draw

we could have had" and "they are very good defensively."

Both managers stressed it will be a night for discipline and concentration from their youthful teams. United, with only three bookings in the tournament (by far the best record) have Paul Scholes and Berg on yellow cards. Monaco could have eight players just one caution away from missing the second leg.

The referee, Manuel Diaz Vega, was excellent in United's win away to Fenerbahce last season, but Stuart Pearce was less enamoured by the bandball he gave in England's match against Switzerland in Euro 96.

United supporters are here in numbers, although not many are thought to have arrived on the many English-registered yachts in the marinas—football

gentrification has not gone that far. The fans are expected to occupy a third of the 15,000-seat ground, but many will still be left ticketless.

To reduce the risk of their swish boulevards being spoiled by excluded fans, Monaco are relaying the game on a big screen outside. A bright idea on the night, but a dangerous precedent in that it encourages fans to travel without tickets to future games.

Inside, there remains concern over the pitch which, despite being better than usual, is still very bobbly. Built over a car park with just eight inches of soil, it is usually a quagmire in winter and hard-baked in summer.

A Monaco official admitted it is often a "chance des pommes de terre". It looked green as United trained last night, but this evening they hope to make hay.

Monaco (probable): Barthez; Dumas; Sagnol; Kovic; Leonard; Legwinna; Dierou; Collin; Benarbia; Ikpeba; Trezeguet or Henry.  
Manchester United (probable): Schuster; G. Neville; Johnson; Berg; Platt; Beckham; Scholes; Bull; P. Neville; Cole; Shearer.  
Referee: M. Diaz Vega (Spain).

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD  
No. 3549, Wednesday 4 March By Aquila

1 Across: To support burdens, travels like a hiker (9)  
6 Across: Mahler's third in the full version (5)  
9 Across: Desperate measure one clutches at, now skin-blemishes return (5)  
10 Across: Beginnings of time, with erythema and languor (9)  
11 Across: Festival on my father's land? (10)  
12 Across: Stock check (4)  
14 Across: Split arrow? (7)  
15 Across: Haggard woman happened to make home-made whiskey (7)  
17 Across: Operating without liquid, Roman emperor needs outside help (7)  
19 Across: Moralizing, target is found round a church (7)

20 Down: Teases old wives (4)  
22 Down: Not food of greens? How upsetting! (3-7)  
25 Down: Eleventh-hour revival of the side (9)  
26 Down: One mile past is as far as an insect can go (5)  
27 Down: Distinctive character of those in trouble (5)  
28 Down: Sitting a lot deters any constitution (9)

1 Down: Lifting the foot that is shorter (5)  
3 Down: Cash to keep Mum, we hear (4-5)  
13 Down: Commonplace president a-straying (10)  
14 Down: Formerly, a short deck-game and square-dance (8)  
16 Down: Dish left in derelict hacienda (9)  
18 Down: Contaminates mountain-passes (7)  
19 Down: Daughter after sailorman, staring in astonishment (3-4)  
21 Down: Group getting cold in tub (5)  
23 Down: Splendour of the golden-headed parrot (5)  
24 Down: Units of energy required in the Holberg Suite? (4)

## Sheffield United chairman vents fury as Spackman quits

By Chris Maume

CLUB chairman is not wont to admit their mistakes, but Nigel Spackman resigned as Sheffield United manager on Monday night to pursue a new career. The 37-year-old, who had worked without a contract and when questioned on the subject always said he was in negotiations, clearly decided he had had enough—especially following the recent departure of his coach, Willie Donachie, to join Joe Royle at Manchester City.

McDonald accused Spackman of putting himself before the club and believes the former Liverpool, Chelsea and Rangers midfielder was not up to the task of running a team on his own. "Spackman was never the same man after Willie Donachie left," McDonald said. "When the pressure came he couldn't cope with it. I was persuaded to give him his chance when we lost Scarborough's Mick Wadsworth, who turned down an offer to become Spackman's assistant last week, is also thought to be in the frame. An announcement is likely to be made today. The coaches Steve Thompson and Russell Slade took charge for last night's game against Ipswich."

Spackman is thought to have grown frustrated with the board's policy of putting balance sheets

before team sheets and shedding some of the club's best players, of whom he had been forced to sell five in the last four months.

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